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Climate change to impact wheat & rice yields up to 10%

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Quick commerce boosts blue-collar jobs in India

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India eye dominance in ODI series against Ireland

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Parents compelled to fund daughter's education, says SC

It adds parents must pay within their means

NEW DELHI, 9 JAN

Daughter has an indefeasible, legally enforceable and legitimate right to secure educational expenses from her parents, who can be compelled to provide necessary funds within their means, the Supreme Court recently said.

The remarks of a bench comprising Justices Surya Kant and Ujjal Bhuyan came in a matrimonial dispute in which the daughter of the estranged couple, who was studying in Ireland, refused to accept Rs 43 lakh given by her father towards her studies as a part of the total alimony being paid to her mother.

"She, being the daughter, has an indefeasible, legally enforceable, lawful, and legitimate right to secure educational expenses from her parents. All that we observe is that the daughter has a fundamental right to pursue her education, for which the parents could be compelled to provide necessary funds within the limit of their financial resources," said the bench's January 2 order.

PHOTO: PTI

The daughter of the parties, it said, to maintain her own dignity had declined to retain the amount and asked him to take the money back but he refused.

The daughter was legally entitled to the amount, the court said.

The father was said to have spent the money without any compelling reasons, indicating he was financially sound to provide her with the financial assistance towards her academic pursuits.

The bench referred to the settlement agreement entered into by the estranged couple on 28 November, 2024 which was also signed by the daughter.

The court said the husband had agreed to pay a total sum of Rs 73 lakh to his estranged wife and daughter, of which Rs 43 lakh was meant for his daughter's academic goals, and the rest for his wife.

It observed since the wife had received her Rs 30 lakh share, and the parties were admittedly living separately for the last 26 years, the bench saw no reason to not grant of a decree of divorce by mutual consent. —*PTI*

'NO ERROR'

SC rejects review of same-sex marriage verdict

NEW DELHI, 9 JAN

Supreme Court has dismissed petitions seeking a review of its October 2023 judgment that denied legal recognition to same-sex marriage, stating there were no 'error apparent' in the verdict and no need for interference.

The review petitions were considered in chambers by a bench comprising Justices BR Gavai, Surya Kant, BV Nagarathna, PS Narasimha, and Dipankar Datta. The bench noted that it had thoroughly examined the majority judgments authored by Justice SRavindra Bhat (for himself and Justice Hima Kohli) and Justice PS Narasimha and found them consistent with the law.

"We have carefully reviewed the judgments and do not find any error apparent on the face of the record," the bench stated. "The views expressed in both judgments align with the law, and no interference is warranted. Accordingly, the review petitions are dismissed."

PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

In its 2023 ruling, the court stated there was 'no unqualified right' to marriage outside those recognized by law. However, it strongly advocated for the rights of the LGBTQIA++ community, countering the Centre's argument that queerness is "urban" or "elitist."

Justice SK Kaul had remarked, "Same-sex relationships have existed since antiquity, not only for sexual activities but for emotional fulfillment. These unions should be recognised as partnerships of love and companionship, guided by constitutional morality, not social morality. —*Agencies*

FARMER DIES AFTER SUICIDE ATTEMPT

PATIALA, 9 JAN

A 55-year-old farmer protesting at the Shambhu border allegedly committed suicide on Thursday by consuming a poisonous substance, farmer leaders said, the second such incident at the agitation site within three weeks.

Resham Singh, who was from Pahuwind in Tarn Taran district, took the extreme step at the Shambhu border point between Punjab and Haryana where farmers have been protesting for almost a year now, pressing the Centre guarantees Minimum Support Price (MSP) for crops. Resham Singh was taken to the Rajindra hospital in Patiala where he died, the farmers said. Farmer leader Tejvir Singh said Resham was upset with the Central government for not resolving the issues. Another farmer, Ranjodh Singh, committed suicide at the Shambhu border on 18 December. Ranjodh was distressed by the deterioration of health of farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal,70, who has been on a fast-unto-death since 26 November. —*PTI*

Uttarakhand to implement UCC this month: CM Dhami

BAREILLY, 9 JAN

Uttarakhand Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami has announced the imminent implementation of the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) in the state, making it the first in India to enact such legislation. Speaking at the 29th Uttarayani Mela in Bareilly, Dhami described the UCC as essential for providing equal rules around marriage, divorce, and inheritance for all citizens, excluding Scheduled Tribes. The code mandates the registration of all marriages and live-in relationships. In addition to the UCC, Dhami outlined plans to enhance tourism and infrastructure, including the Ganga Corridor in Haridwar and Rishikesh, as well as beautification projects for temples in the Kumaon region. He also highlighted measures to strengthen governance with new anti-conversion and anti-riot laws, aiming to recover damages from riot perpetrators. — *PTI*

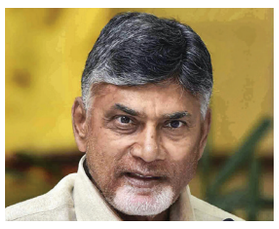

PHOTO: PTI

Andhra stampede: FIR blames victim; 3 babus transfered

TIRUPATI, 9 JAN

As the N Chandrababu Naidu led TDP government and the management board Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams came under fire for Wednesday stampede that claimed six Lives, the FIR filed on the incident blamed the victim and the crowd for the incident. The Tirupati east police registered two separate FIRs following the deaths of six devotees during the Vaikunta Ekadasi celebrations. R Malliga aged 50, from Tamil Nadu's Mettur Salem district, collapsed in queue for darshan tokens at Vishnunivasam. P Srinivasulu, a tahsilder from Balaiahpalli Mandal filed a complaint stating that Malliga lost consciousness during surge of devotees. Naidu confirmed the transfer of three senior officials, including the district Superintendent of Police, and the suspension of two officials, including a Deputy Superintendent of Police, for their negligence. — *PTI*

>>>More on Page 4

Kejri says BJP is adding non-Delhi voters in list

NEW DELHI, 9 JAN

AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal alleged that people associated with the BJP applied to add 13,000 new voters in the electoral roll and they sought to cancel 5,500 voter entries to "influence" the voting in its favour. Kejriwal also lodged a complaint on Thursday with the Election Commission (EC), alleging that the BJP has manipulated the electoral roll in the New Delhi assembly constituency from where he is contesting the upcoming elections. "This raises serious concerns, as when the Election Commission contacted some of these people, they denied submitting such applications. All 89 individuals contacted stated they had not filed any requests. It clearly indicates a scam," he said. He highlighted the surge in registration applications. His remarks sparked backlash from the BJP, with leaders from the party condemning his comments.— *PTI*

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CHIMNEY COLLAPSE

One labourer was killed and another injured after a silo collapsed at a smelting plant in Chhattisgarh's Mungeli district on Thursday. Two others are feared trapped under the debris in the incident that occurred at around 1.30 pm at Kusum Smelters Private Limited, located near Rambod village in Sargaon area **PHOTO: PTI**

Govt plans for 19K MW power demand for summer without outages

BENGALURU, 9 JAN

Karnataka Energy Minister KJ George announced that the state anticipates a peak power consumption of 19,000 megawatts during the forthcoming summer months. In a proactive approach, the minister assured citizens that the state is well-prepared for the seasonal surge in demand, particularly as power production typically declines.

During a review meeting at the Doddaballapura Deputy Commissioner's office, attended by district representatives, BESCOM, and KPTCL officials, George instructed the energy department to implement strategic measures to prevent any disruptions in electricity supply. He stated the goal is to avoid any load-shedding scenarios this summer, especially as last year's peak demand reached approximately 17,000 MW, which was successfully managed by the energy department.

KJ George **PHOTO: X**

The minister highlighted that a projected increase in power demand necessitates the sourcing of electricity from neighbouring states, with an emphasis on securing favourable agreements for power exchanges. In light of the high costs associated with short-term electricity procurement, he underscored the need for establishing long-term contracts at lower rates, ensuring cost-effective energy solutions.

George's directives aim to ensure that consumers receive a reliable electricity supply throughout the peak summer months, as the state gears up for the anticipated surge in energy demand. —*PTI*

PM UNVEILS GENOME SEQUENCING

NEW DELHI, 9 JAN

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday released the genome sequencing data of 10,000 Indian nationals and said it will be a milestone in the field of biotechnology research.

The Genome India Data, that represents the genetic diversity in the country, will be available to researchers at the Indian Biological Data Centre (IBDC) through "managed access".

Modi said more than 20 renowned research institutions like IITs, Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), and Biotechnology Research and Innovation Centre (BRIC) have played an important role in this research. —*PTI*

Wind up INDIA if it is only for LS polls: Omar

JAMMU, 9 JAN

Jammu and Kashmir chief minister Omar Abdullah on Thursday reacted to Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) leader Tejashwi Yadav's claims that the INDIA bloc was limited to Lok Sabha elections. He expressed concerns over the lack of clarity regarding the leadership and agenda, suggesting that if the alliance is intended solely for the upcoming parliamentary elections, it should be dissolved.

Speaking to reporters on Thursday, Abdullah stated that the AAP, Congress, and other political parties must collaborate to effectively challenge the BJP. "After the Assembly elections in Delhi, an all-member meeting of the alliance should be convened. If this bloc is only for the Lok Sabha elections, it should be wound up, and we will operate independently. However, if it is meant for Assembly elections too, we must work together," he remarked.

Abdullah noted that he expects clarity on the bloc's future following the Delhi elections, where discussions about its strategy and leadership are urgently needed. He highlighted the absence of meetings within the alliance, which has raised questions regarding its continuance. Regarding the support for AAP ahead of the Delhi elections next month, Abdullah refrained from taking a position, stating, "We have no involvement with Delhi polls. AAP other parties will determine how best to counter the BJP." —*PTI*

CM'S HOME DISTRICT

Lack of burial site delays Dalit woman's funeral in Mysuru

MYSURU, 9 JAN

A 56-year-old woman's body was kept for nearly two days in T Narasipura town due to the lack of a burial site for the nomadic Koracha families. The incident occurred in the home district of Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, with the town represented by District Minister HC Mahadevappa.

Rathnamma, 56, the wife of Hanumanthappa, had migrated from Davangere nearly 30 years ago and settled in T Narasipura. She passed away from an illness on Tuesday. Belonging to the Scheduled Caste Koracha community, her family held local identification documents, including Aadhaar and ration cards, with their T Narasipura address.

PHOTO: X

Despite this, local residents who have separate burial grounds for communities such as scheduled tribe Nayakas, Kurubas, Vokkaligas, Veerashaivas, Scheduled Castes, and other backward classes did not allow Rathnamma's family to perform her last rites in the town. They cited her status as a migrant from Davangere.

With no other option, Rathnamma's family transported her body to their native place in Davangere, where they conducted her last rites on Thursday.

Speaking to reporters, Dalit Sangharsha Samithi district convener Alagud Shivakumar highlighted the plight of around 30 nomadic Koracha families living in T Narasipura for nearly 40 years, eking out a living through menial jobs. Despite repeated pleas to the government their demands have been ignored, he said. —*Salar News*

UP GOVERNMENT TO REVIEW 1978 SAMBHAL RIOTS

SAMBHAL, 9 JAN

The Uttar Pradesh government has begun reviewing cases registered during the 1978 Sambhal riots, which left many dead and injured. The violence saw 162 cases registered at Kotwali police station, with one case involving multiple deaths handed over to the Crime Branch CID, while the rest were investigated by local police. Most accused in these cases were reportedly Muslims.

The riots began on 29 March, 1978, after a Hindu man killed a cleric inside the Jama Masjid. The assailant was beaten by the public, but tensions escalated, affecting large parts of the district. Sources revealed that unrest had been building for a month prior to the incident. —*Agencies*

Pune woman killed by co-worker, others watch

PUNE, 9 JAN

A 28-year-old BPO employee, Shubhada Kodare, stabbed to death with a cleaver by her colleague in the parking lot of their company in Pune on Tuesday. Several bystanders witnessed the brutal act but did not intervene. Some even recorded the incident. The attack, allegedly over money borrowed under false pretenses. The attacker, Krishna Kanoja, 30, an accountant at WNS Global, claimed Kodare had borrowed money several times, citing her father's illness. Suspecting deceit, Kanoja visited her native place and discovered her father was in good health. Confronting Kodare around 6 pm on Tuesday in their office parking lot, an argument ensued, and Kanoja attacked her.

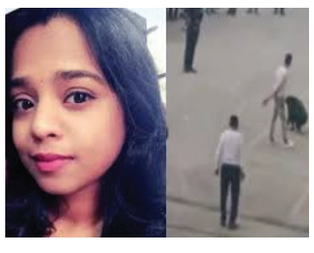


PHOTO: SCREENGRAB

Kodare was left writhing on the ground until Kanoja discarded the weapon and was held by the crowd. She was rushed to a hospital with severe injuries but was declared dead around 9 pm. Police have arrested Kanoja and registered a case. Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar criticised Police for failing to address rising crime in the city.

—*Agencies*

Building damaged in gas cylinder explosion in B'luru

BENGALURU, 9 JAN

An explosion, suspected to be caused by a gas leak, rocked a Tibetan fast-food establishment in the Mathikere police station area this evening. Fortunately, no casualties were reported as the building was unoccupied at the time. The blast caused notable damage to nearby structures, including an electric pole, and although initial reports claimed that windows of the nearby MS Ramaiah College were affected, police later clarified this assertion. Residents reported a strong smell of gas shortly before the explosion, leading investigators to suspect a leak from an LPG cylinder. Emergency services, including local police and forensic teams, swiftly arrived at the scene to examine the aftermath and collect evidence to ascertain the blast's cause.The eatery operates out of a two-storey building that also accommodates three commercial shops and three families. As a precaution, authorities evacuated the neighbouring families while forensic investigations continue to ensure public safety and determine the precise cause of the explosion. *—Salar News*

Hubballi-Dharwad, Bidar observes peaceful bandh

HUBBALLI/BIDAR, 9 JAN

Hubballi-Dharwad and Bidar towns observed a peaceful bandh in protest against Union Home Minister Amit Shah's recent remarks on Dr BR Ambedkar. Various Dalit organisations, the block unit of Congress, BSP and RPI and many other organisations participated in the bandh. Congress legislator Prasad Abbaya, who joined the protest at Rani Channamma Circle, said, "The closure of entire Hubballi-Dharwad towns reveals people's anguish against Amit Shah and respect to Ambedkar." Public vehicles stayed off the roads. Barring a few instances of forcing commercial establishment to down shutters and deflating the tyres of a few vehicles, no untoward incidents were reported.*—Salar News*

Mysuru mulls ban on pvt vehicles at Chamundi Hills

MYSURU, 9 JAN

The Mysuru district administration, in collaboration with the Srikshetra Chamundi Hills Development Authority, is contemplating a ban on the entry of all private vehicles to Chamundi Hills. This proposal, recently discussed by the district authorities, aims to address growing concerns over parking issues and the ecological impact of increasing vehicle numbers atop the hills. The authorities have submitted a formal request to the state government, seeking approval for the ban. If approved, the district administration plans to introduce state-run buses that will transport visitors from the foothills to the top of the hill. Additionally, a new parking facility will be established near the foothills. *—Salar News*

List of selected pourakarmikas by March end: BBMP

BENGALURU, 9 JAN

Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) Chief Commissioner Tushar Girinath announced that the recruitment orders for the final list of selected Pourakarmikas would be issued by the end of March 2025. This assurance was made during a programme commemorating the birth anniversary of IPD Salappa held at the Dr Rajkumar Glass House in the BBMP's central office premises in the city on Thursday. The Chief Commissioner stated that verification processes, including police checks and reservation certificate validations for the selected candidates, are currently underway and will be completed within the stipulated timeline. *—Salar News*

B'desh uncertainty opens doors for Ballari's jeans sector

154 acres are acquired for the park where global firms are expected

BENGALURU, 9 JAN

Large and Medium Industries Minister MB Patil on Thursday said the Karnataka Industrial Areas Development Board (KIADB) will set up a jeans park at Sanjeevarayanakote near Ballari. He said the political uncertainty in Bangladesh has created an opportunity to bolster the jeans industry.

The minister said 154 acres of land have already been acquired for the project, a promise by Congress leader Rahul Gandhi during the Bharat Jodo Yatra.

Globally renowned companies are expected to establish their presence in the proposed park, a statement from his office quoted Patil as saying.

"The unstable situation in Bangladesh has prompted investors and exporters to explore alternatives, and Ballari has emerged as a favourable destination. We aim to capitalise on this by attracting significant investments in the jeans sector," he said.

Large and Medium Industries Minister MB Patil **PHOTO: PTI**

Noting that Ballari is home to over 500 jeans manufacturing units, which zgenerate tens of thousands of direct and indirect jobs, the minister said, the Industries Department plans to develop the area into an organised export hub with assistance from the Textile Department.

During the Bharat Jodo Yatra, Rahul Gandhi interacted with workers and employers in Ballari's jeans industry. He assured them of setting up a jeans park and subsequently wrote to the Industries Department on 1 August, 2023, regarding the implementation of the project.

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah also announced the initiative in the state budget presented in February 2024, he said, and added that the project aims to elevate the jeans industry in Ballari to global standards.. *—PTI*

Corruption case: 43 ex-BBMP officials get ED notice

BENGALURU, 9 JAN

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has intensified its investigation into allegations of corruption and discrepancies within the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) by issuing notices to 43 former officials. This development comes a day after ED officials seized several documents from the office of BBMP Chief Engineer BS Prahlad in the city.

On Tuesday, an ED team conducted a raid on the office of the Engineer-in-Chief and confiscated documents related to infrastructure projects from 2016, specifically concerning bore well and RO plant initiatives undertaken by the Karnataka Rural Infrastructure Development Limited (KRIDL). Sources indicate that a preliminary review of the documents revealed significant discrepancies in calculations, prompting the issuance of notices to former BBMP officials, including Chief Engineers from Rajarajeshwari Nagar, KR Puram, Yeshwanthpur, and Bommanahalli. The notices were delivered through BBMP Commissioner Tushar Girinath on Thursday.

The ED has also requested order copies and reports issued by the standing committee between 2015 and 2024. Furthermore, sector-wise reports on bore well and RO plant projects implemented between 2015 and 2019, with budgets ranging from Rs 3 crore to Rs 10 crore, have been demanded. These reports have to include details of the officials and engineers who headed the projects, the rationale behind their initiation, and the source of the demand for such projects. *—Salar News*

Naxalism has 'more or less' ended in K'taka: HM

BENGALURU, 9 JAN

Naxalism has "more or less" ended in Karnataka, Home Minister G Parameshwara said on Thursday, following the surrender of six Maoists. He also strongly defended their surrender before Chief Minister Siddaramaiah amid criticism.

He stated that the Maoists were unarmed when they surrendered, and the police would investigate where they might have left their weapons.

The group of six Maoists who surrendered on Wednesday includes four from Karnataka—Mundagaru Latha from Sringeri, Vanajakshi Balehole from Kalasa, Sundari Kutluru from Dakshina Kannada, and Mareppa Aroli from Raichur. The other two are Vasantha K from Vellore in Tamil Nadu and N Jeesha from Wayanad in Kerala.

"Who is saying it was not appropriate for the Naxals to surrender before the CM? They should explain what is wrong and why they think it is wrong. We wanted to send a message to society that Naxalism has no place. When the surrender happens before the CM, the whole state becomes aware, and those who believe in Naxalism may rethink," Parameshwara said in response to criticism from the BJP. He said the surrender was intended to send a message to those involved in Naxal activities, making them aware that the government and the CM are committed to reforming them.

Six Naxals who surrendered in the presence of Chief Minister Siddaramaiah were produced before a special court of the National Investigation Agency. *—PTI*

MAKAR SANKRANTI

A shopkeeper sells kites for Makar Sankranti which is to be held on 14 January in Bengaluru on Thursday **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

ALERT DRIVER AVERTS ACCIDENT IN MYSURU

MYSURU, 9 JAN

Passengers aboard a KSRTC bus travelling from Mysuru City to Hullahalli in Nanjangud taluk narrowly escaped a major accident on Thursday near Doora village in Mysuru taluk.

The incident occurred when the bus's steering mechanism malfunctioned. However, the quick-thinking driver acted swiftly, steering the bus into an agricultural field and bringing it to a stop, preventing a potential disaster.

Despite an electric pole being in close proximity, the driver exercised great caution. The vehicle halted just meters away from the Varuna canal, where the retaining walls have been damaged, leaving safety measures compromised. Passengers were relieved as the situation was averted. *—Salar News*

Hassan Municipal head arrested in bribery case

BENGALURU, 9 JAN

- Complainant alleged that Suresh demanded the bribe to secure a stay on an order issued by the Court of Additional Registrar of Cooperative Societies

Hassan City Municipal Commissioner TN Narasimha Murthy was caught red-handed by Lokayukta officials while accepting a bribe of Rs 1.5 lakh from a contractor on Thursday.

Along with Murthy, engineer Venkatesh was also arrested.

According to the Lokayukta, the trap was laid following a complaint by contractor Sunil Kumar.

The Commissioner had allegedly demanded the Rs 1.5 lakh bribe for clearing a bill.

As soon as Murthy accepted the money, Lokayukta officials apprehended him.

"The accused persons have been secured, and the bribe amount has been recovered. The investigation is ongoing," the Lokayukta said in a statement. In a similar action in Bengaluru, the Lokayukta team arrested Suresh, the Office Superintendent of Karnataka Appellate Tribunal, Hall-5, for taking a bribe of Rs 60,000 on Thursday.

Complainant Basavaraju Nadikeshwara Matha from Sirsi in Uttara Kannada district alleged that Suresh had demanded the bribe to secure a stay on an order issued by the Court of Additional Registrar of Cooperative Societies in Hubballi.

"The accused was caught red-handed while accepting the bribe money, and an investigation is ongoing," the Lokayukta added. *—PTI*

7 dead in two separate accidents

RAMANAGARA/ RANIPET, 9 JAN

- The accident happened when the KSRTC bus was heading towards Bengaluru with around 55 passengers, and the driver overtook a tipper lorry. The bus rammed into the vegetable-laden truck coming from opposite direction

Three of a family, including two children, were killed after the motorcycle they were travelling on collided with a KSRTC bus here on Thursday morning, police said.

A woman was critically injured and was taken to hospital. According to the police, the accident took place at Achalu village between Ramanagara and Kanakapura. The motorist, along with his wife and two children, was going from Kanakapura to Ramanagara.

A KSRTC bus coming from the opposite direction hit the motorcycle, resulting in an accident.

In another incident at least four pilgrims from Kolar were killed when the bus they were travelling in was involved in an accident with a vegetable-laden truck and another heavy vehicle. The victims, mostly hailing from Kolar, were returning home in a KSRTC bus after visiting a temple near Chennai, the sources said. About 30 people were injured in the accident.

The accident happened when the KSRTC bus was heading towards Bengaluru with around 55 passengers, and the driver overtook a tipper lorry. The bus rammed into the vegetable-laden truck coming from opposite direction.

The lorry also hit the KSRTC bus from the behind. Visuals showed the bus having suffered damage under the impact. All the deceased were killed on the spot. The injured have been referred to nearby hospitals, they said *—PTI*

CM MEETS KODAVAS

CM Siddaramaiah with the Kodava community in Bengaluru on Thursday. Siddaramaiah handed over a cheque of Rs 1 crore to the Kundyolanda family, organisers of the 2024 Kodava hockey festival. Last year, the tournament set a Guinness World Record for being the largest field hockey event **PHOTO: SALAR**

BJP MLC Ravi gives statement to CID on Belagavi attack

BENGALURU, 9 JAN

BJP leader CT Ravi recorded his statement before CID officers investigating an attack on him during the final day of the Belagavi Legislature session on 19 December.

Ravi, a Member of the Legislative Council, was allegedly assaulted by a group of individuals angered by his purportedly derogatory remarks aimed at the state's Woman and Child Welfare Minister, Laxmi Hebbalkar, during a session in the Legislative Council.

Following the incident, the police reportedly detained Ravi and took him to various locations concerning his remarks regarding Minister Hebbalkar.

According to Ravi, several BJP legislators filed a complaint with council chairperson Basavaraj Horatti about the attack while he was en route to the council at Suvarna Vidhana Soudha.

Horatti subsequently ordered a police investigation into the matter. As a result, the authorities summoned Ravi to provide his statement.

"I have shared comprehensive details of the incident with the investigating officer. I detailed the individuals involved in the assault, the slogans they shouted, and the abusive language used," the BJP leader informed reporters after his CID visit. *—PTI*

'BAN ACROSS KARNATAKA'

Ban unmarried couples in OYO: Bajrang Dal

BENGALURU, 9 JAN

The Bajrang Dal has submitted a formal proposal to authorities, urging them to prohibit unmarried couples from checking into OYO hotels in the city. The proposal was submitted to Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) Commissioner Tushar Girinath and City Police Commissioner B Dayananda.

The appeal was led by former District Convenor Tejas A Gowda, who cited a recent decision by Oyo in Meerut, Uttar Pradesh, where the company implemented a rule barring unmarried couples from booking rooms. OYO has announced plans to extend this policy to other cities in the country. Bajrang Dal activists are now demanding that a similar policy be enforced not only in Bengaluru but across Karnataka. The petition also calls for the extension of this restriction to homestays, lodges, service apartments, and other hotels. Gowda, addressing the media, expressed particular concern over areas like Shantinagar, BTM Layout, Jayanagar, and Bommanahalli, which are perceived as central hubs of the city. Gowda alleged that boys and girls are often allowed to cohabit in paying guest accommodations (PGs) under the guise of live-in relationships. Speaking to **Salar News**, Bhargavi, Social Media Head, OYO Bengaluru, confirmed that there are no such directives from the company yet. "Oyo will hold a meeting with the authorities in Bengaluru before making any official statement. So far nothing has been decided," she added. *—Salar News*

The petition also calls for the extension of this restriction to homestays, lodges, service apartments, and other hotels **PHOTO: X**

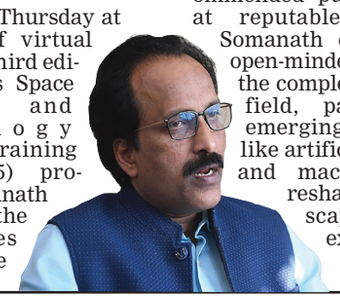
Space is time-consuming science, not just elation: ISRO

BENGALURU, 9 JAN

ISRO chairman S Somanath on Thursday said space science is not just about the excitement of becoming astronomers, but it also involves complex and time-consuming science, an expertise that can only be built persistently over the years.

Speaking on Thursday at the launch of virtual launch of the third edition of ISRO's Space Science and Technology Awareness Training (START 2025) programme, Somanath noted that the field goes beyond the allure of astronomy, demanding rigorous and sustained effort in scientific research.

This year's START programme will engage 20,000 students from over 560 institutions, running from 9 to 29 January. He urged students to reflect on their interests to specialise within the vast realm of space science and recommended pursuing studies at reputable institutions. Somanath encouraged an open-minded approach to the complex nature of the field, particularly as emerging technologies like artificial intelligence and machine learning reshaping the landscape of space exploration. *—PTI*



My research found Indira Gandhi was weak: Kangana

MUMBAI, 9 JAN

Kangana Ranaut, who plays the role Indira Gandhi in her new film "Emergency", said she did extensive research and now believes the former prime minister was not powerful as she had thought but "weak" and "unsure of herself". The first-time MP from Mandi, often in the headlines for her provocative comments, also said there is no director today who deserves her. Ranaut, who has directed and produced the film that documents the 21 months of Emergency imposed in 1975 by the then prime minister, said she has empathy for Indira Gandhi and viewed as very powerful until she started working on the project. "But when I did my research, I understood it was quite the contrary. It also strengthened my belief that the weaker you are, the more control you would want. She was a very weak person and she was also very unsure of herself and really vulnerable. —*PTI*

Jarange booked for remark against minister Munde

LATUR, 9 JAN

Police in Maharashtra's Latur district have registered a case against Maratha quota activist Manoj Jarange for allegedly making derogatory comments against state minister and NCP leader Dhananjay Munde and his community during a public rally, an official said. The case was registered at Kingaon police station in Ahmedpur taluka of the district on Tuesday, he said. According to the complaint lodged by the minister's supporter Kishor Munde, Jarange made objectionable and loose statements against Dhananjay Munde and the Vanjari community that he belongs to during a public rally held at Parbhani on January 4, assistant police inspector Sahebrao Khandare told PTI. —*PTI*

M'rashtra BJP MLA claims Karad has Rs 100 cr assets

CHHATRAPATI SAMBHAJINAGAR, 9 JAN

Maharashtra BJP MLA Suresh Dhas on Thursday claimed that Walmik Karad, arrested in an extortion case linked to sarpanch Santosh Deshmukh's murder, has assets of more than Rs 100 crore and got a notice from the ED in 2022. Deshmukh, the sarpanch of Massajog village in Beed district, was abducted, tortured, and murdered on December 9, allegedly in retaliation for his efforts to prevent extortion attempts against an energy firm linked to a windmill project. As part of the investigation, police have so far arrested seven people connected to the case. One of the accused is still absconding. Walmik Karad, an associate of NCP minister Dhananjay Munde, has been arrested in a related extortion case. —*PTI*

Kejri files plaint over BJP's 'outsider' voters

AAP chief also demands action against BJP leader Verma, accusing him of bribing voters

NEW DELHI, 9 JAN

AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal on Thursday lodged a complaint with the Election Commission, alleging that the BJP has manipulated the electoral roll in the New Delhi assembly constituency from where he is contesting the upcoming elections.

Kejriwal alleged that people associated with the BJP applied to add 13,000 new voters in the electoral roll and they sought to cancel 5,500 voter entries to "influence" the voting in its favour.

The former Delhi chief minister visited the Election Commission (EC) on Thursday to lodge a complaint against these alleged malpractices.

Addressing the media after meeting EC officials, Kejriwal said, "In the past 22 days, 5,500 applications have been received for deletion of voter names in the New Delhi constituency. There are about one lakh voters in this constituency, meaning applications to remove 5.5 per cent of the electorate have been filed in just 22 days."

"This raises serious concerns, as when the Election Commission contacted some of these people, they denied submitting such applications. All 89 individuals contacted stated they had not filed any requests. It clearly indicates a scam," he said.

AAP chief also demanded action against BJP leader Verma, accusing him of bribing voters and distributing money.

Quashing BJP leaders' claims that he would contest the upcoming Delhi Assembly elections from a second seat out of fear of losing from New Delhi, Kejriwal said he will contest the polls from one seat only.

Kejriwal also asserted that the Assembly polls are not an INDA bloc affair as there is a direct contest between AAP and BJP. —*PTI*

Delhi Chief Minister Atishi with AAP National Convenor Arvind Kejriwal and Punjab CM Bhagwant Mann during a press conference **PHOTO: PTI**

'Want to work with Delhi to resolve J&K problems'

JAMMU, 9 JAN

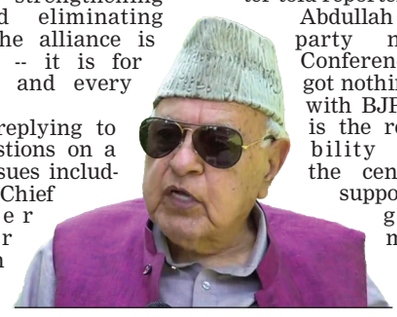
National Conference President Farooq Abdullah on Thursday said his party does not intend to "fight" New Delhi to collaborate with the central government to address the pressing issues of Jammu and Kashmir.

Addressing concerns about the unity within the INDIA bloc, Abdullah said the alliance is not just about contesting elections, but it is about strengthening India and eliminating hatred. "The alliance is permanent -- it is for every day and every moment."

He was replying to media questions on a range of issues including about Chief Minister Omar Abdullah being dubbed a "New Delhi man", fissures in the INDIA bloc with the AAP and Congress fighting the Delhi polls separately, the dual power structure in J&K, Maha Kumbh and the Tirupati stampede.

"We don't want to fight New Delhi. We want to work together with Delhi to resolve the state's problems. We don't want to engage in battles. Those who want to fight can do so," the former chief minister told reporters here.

Abdullah said his party national Conference has got nothing to do with BJP, but it is the responsibility of the central to support state governments —*PTI*



Delhi HC questions plea against AAP's poll promise

NEW DELHI, 9 JAN

Delhi High Court on Thursday questioned the petitioner on the maintainability of a plea against the AAP's recent poll promise of paying a stipend to women under the Mukhya Mantri Mahila Samman Yojana scheme in the national capital.

Justice Jyoti Singh questioned the petitioner on how an election petition was maintainable on the issue.

"How is it maintainable as an election petition? You go and file a PIL," the court said.

The petitioner said AAP was luring voters with a false announcement as Delhi government had already denied having such a scheme. —*PTI*

Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Odisha Governor Hari Babu, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, Union Minister Dharmendra Pradhan, and Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi **PHOTO: PTI**

Future not in war, but in Buddha, says Modi

BHUBANESWAR, 9 JAN

Asserting that the world today listens to India, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday said that due to the country's heritage, it is able to tell the international community that the future does not lie in 'yudh' (war) but in 'Budh' (Buddha).

Addressing the diaspora at the 18th Pravasi Bharatiya Divas convention in Bhubaneswar, Modi said India is not only the mother of democracy, but democracy is a part of people's lives here.

In his address, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said the diaspora has become more important with each passing year. "Whether it is technology, best practices or resources, be it tourism, trade or investment, the two-way flow is invaluable as we strive to build a global workforce," he said."

Meanwhile, Hundreds of Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) from across the world, who gathered at the Janata Maidan here to take part in the 18th Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD) convention on Thursday, expressed their appreciation for warm welcome and preparations made for the event, which is being celebrated as a grand festival in Odisha. —*PTI*

INDIA, US UNITED IN WAR ON TERROR: ENVOY

MUMBAI, 9 JAN

US ambassador to India Eric Garcetti on Thursday said India and America are united in the fight against terrorism and expressed satisfaction over the "increased" intelligence sharing and cooperation between the two countries to bring perpetrators to justice.

The American Dream and the Indian Dream are flip sides of the same coin, he said, adding that the relationship between the two countries was "multiplicative" and that they have responsibility beyond their borders.

Addressing a gathering on Peace and the role of the US-India defence and security partnership organised in Mumbai, Garcetti said terrorism snuffs out many innocent lives.

Garcetti, whose term as the US ambassador to India is ending soon, also described his tenure in the country as the "most extraordinary", and said India captured his heart. —*PTI*

4 Kerala MLAs booked for abetment to suicide

WAYANAD, 9 JAN

Congress MLA IC Balakrishnan, Wayanad District Congress Committee (DCC) President ND Appachan and two others have been booked for abetment to suicide of the party's Wayanad district office-bearer N M Vijayan, police said on Thursday.

A senior police officer of the district confirmed that the section of abetment of suicide under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita has been added to the FIR in connection with the death of Wayanad DCC treasurer Vijayan and his son.

The officer also confirmed that Balakrishnan, Appachan and two others, who were mentioned in Vijayan's suicide note, have been named as accused in the case.

"The action was taken based on Vijayan's suicide note," the officer said.

Reacting to the development, Appachan told reporters that Vijayan never told him what was happening, and he was now being implicated in the case as his name was mentioned in the note.

"I have never taken money from anyone. I do not have a lot of assets. I have lived an honest life. I will face the case legally. I have no other option," he said.

He also said that the party was with Vijayan's family.

The Leader of Opposition in the Assembly, VD Satheesan, said the law can take its own course and the party was not against that.

"But, the party will also carry out an internal investigation. That is our right. We have to know what actually happened and whether the allegations are true. Based on the party investigation, a decision will be taken," Satheesan said. —*PTI*

PHOTO: FB

TN Assembly demands rollback of new UGC rules

CHENNAI, 9 JAN

Tamil Nadu Assembly on Thursday urged the Union Education Ministry to immediately withdraw the University Grants Commission's new regulation 2025 on appointing vice-chancellors of universities, a move which was against the fundamental principle of the Constitution and federalism, it said.

It can harm the higher education system of Tamil Nadu, the resolution passed with the support of all political parties, including the PMK, an ally of the BJP, said. The Opposition AIADMK, too, backed the DMK and its allies on resolution.

BJP leader Nainar Nagendran, however, opposed, saying it was unacceptable since only the draft resolutions were released.

Piloting the resolution, Chief Minister MK Stalin said the new draft UGC regulations 2025 (released by Union Education Minister Dharmedra Pradhan in New Delhi on January 6) empowering Governors in the appointment of VCs would 'ruin' universities. —*PTI*

Paralympic athletes among 10K R-Day invitees

NEW DELHI, 9 JAN

Members of Paralympic contingent, sarpanches from top-performing villages, handloom artisans, and forest and wildlife conservation workers are among the nearly 10,000 special guests invited to witness the 76th Republic Day Parade at the Kartavya Path here, the government said on Thursday.

"These architects of 'Swarnim Bharat', with diverse backgrounds, include best performers in various fields and those who have made best use of the schemes of the government," the defence ministry said in a statement.

The invitees also include handloom artisans, members of Paralympic contingent, forest and wildlife conservation volunteers and workers **PHOTO: X**

In line with the objective to increase 'Jan Bhagidari' (public participation) in events of national importance, approximately 10,000 special guests have been invited to witness the Republic Day Parade, it said.

The ministry also shared that these special guests have been drawn fro diverse areas and fields, falling into 31 categories.

The invitees also include handloom artisans, members of Paralympic contingent and forest and wildlife conservation volunteers and workers, according to the statement.

Sarpanches whose villages have achieved targets in selected government initiatives have been invited. A national-level competition was announced by the Department of Administrative Reforms & Public Grievances among panchayats. —*PTI*

MAHA KUMBH 2025

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath with Juna Akhara's Mahant Hari Giri visits Sangam Ghat to review preparations 4 days ahead of Maha Kumbh. With the Maha Kumbh Mela all set to take place from 14 January to 26 February, tight security arrangements are being made and over 40 crore devotees are expected to visit this year **PHOTO: PTI**

FORMULA-E RACE CASE

ACB grills KTR for 6 hours; Rama Rao says cooperated

HYDERABAD, 9 JAN

BRS leader KT Rama Rao, who was questioned by the Anti-Corruption Bureau on Thursday in the Formula-E race case, said he answered all the agency's queries and is prepared to appear again if required.

Speaking to reporters after exiting the ACB headquarters, Rama Rao, the prime accused in the case registered by the ACB over alleged irregularities in the Formula-E race, stated that he had cooperated fully with the agency officials.

"Whatever questions the ACB asked me, I responded in detail to the best of my understanding. I told them that I would appear whenever they call me," said Rama Rao, who was questioned for over six hours.

Terming the case against him as 'false' and 'irrational', he claimed that he told the investigators they were acting under "government pressure" and didn't know what they were doing.

Rao said his agenda when he was minister in the previous regime was to make Hyderabad a pivotal hub for sustainable mobility as the world transitions towards it and Formula-E race was a part of that ambitious vision.

A large number of BRS leaders, including MLAs and former ministers, visited Rao's residence before he left for questioning. —*PTI*

BRS Working President and MLA KT Rama Rao interacts with the media before leaving for Anti-Corruption Bureau office, in Hyderabad **PHOTO: PTI**

Rajya Sabha member Priyanka Chaturvedi and Tesla CEO Elon Musk **PHOTO: PTI/X**

Musk backs RS MP's 'Pak grooming gangs' post

NEW DELHI, 9 JAN

Tesla CEO Elon Musk has endorsed Rajya Sabha member Priyanka Chaturvedi's remark that the blame for grooming gangs in UK should not fall on Asians but just "one rogue nation" which is Pakistan.

Chaturvedi's comments came on the same day the UK's opposition Conservative party pushed for a new national inquiry into the widespread sexual abuse of mostly white British girls by men of predominantly Pakistani descent in northern English towns over several decades.

Chaturvedi objected to remarks made by UK Labour Prime Minister Keir Starmer, who, in a statement on Monday, referenced his tenure as head of the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) from 2008 to 2013, during which he oversaw the first prosecution of an Asian grooming gang.

The grooming gangs controversy has intensified scrutiny on Starmer, who was in charge of the CPS at the time of the scandals. He has since denounced the "lies and misinformation" surrounding the issue.

In UK, attention also turned to Children's Bill, which mandates local authorities to maintain a register of children not attending school as part of efforts to safeguard vulnerable children. —*Agencies*

CPI(M) welcomes 4 freed Periya murder accused

KANNUR, 9 JAN

The four CPI(M) members, including a former MLA, whose sentences in the Periya twin murder case were suspended by the Kerala High Court a day earlier, received a warm welcome from the Left party upon their release from prison on Thursday.

Several senior CPI(M) leaders, including Kannur District Secretary MV Jayarajan and senior leader P Jayarajan, were present outside the central prison to greet them.

When the four accused – former MLA and CPI(M) district leader KV Kunhiraman, Kanhangad block panchayat president K Manikandan, Raghavan Velutholi and AV Bhaskaran – emerged from the prison, they were welcomed with red garlands by party leaders.

P Jayarajan, speaking to reporters outside the jail welcoming four accused, alleged CBI had pursued a political agenda to portray CPI(M) as a party of killers. —*PTI*

Judgement in rape & murder of RG Kar doctor on 18 Jan

KOLKATA, 9 JAN

Judgement in the rape and murder of an on-duty doctor at R G Kar Medical College and Hospital in August last year will be delivered on 18 January by the designated judge of Sealdah court here. Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), which was handed over the probe into the case from the Kolkata Police by the Calcutta High Court, prayed for awarding of death sentence to Sanjay Roy, who was charged with the gruesome crime. The victim's body was found in the seminar room of RG Kar Medical College and Hospital on 9 August. Roy was arrested by the Kolkata Police the next day. The in-camera trial in the rape and murder case commenced on 12 November. Maintaining that other persons were also involved in the crime, the parents of the victim postgraduate trainee said that they expect that they will also be arrested and tried before court. The crime led to nationwide outrage and prolonged protests by doctors in Kolkata. *—PTI*

China-made drone found in Bhopal jail; probe on

BHOPAL, 9 JAN

A China-made drone has been found lying inside the high-security Bhopal Central Jail, prompting authorities to launch a probe into it, an official said on Thursday. A guard near B-block building inside the prison spotted the black drone, which was charged and weighed 30 to 40 gm, between 3.30 pm and 4 pm on Wednesday, jail superintendent Rakesh Kumar Bangre told PTI. No one saw the drone landing in the jail premises, he said, adding that prima facie it appears the unmanned aerial device might be of children who were playing with it near the prison. The jail, spread over 151 acres, houses 3,600 prisoners against its capacity of 2,600, another official said. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

Playback singer P Jayachandran dies at 80

THRISSUR, 9 JAN

P Jayachandran, the celebrated playback singer who recorded over 16,000 songs in Kannada, Malayalam, Tamil, Telugu and Hindi, died at the age of 80. The singer died on Thursday evening while undergoing treatment at a private hospital here, hospital sources said. Jayachandran was widely recognised for his contribution to Indian music, having won several awards for best playback singer. He was also honoured with the Kerala government's prestigious JC Daniel Award. *—PTI*

Kerala court sends bizman Chemmanur to judicial custody

KOCHI, 9 JAN

A court here on Thursday remanded prominent businessman Boby Chemmanur to judicial custody after he was arrested by a Special Investigation Team (SIT) in connection with a sexual harassment case filed against him by Malayalam actress Honey Rose. Chemmanur, whose arrest was recorded on Wednesday evening, was produced before the Ernakulam Judicial First-Class Magistrate Court II on Thursday afternoon. Seeking bail for Chemmanur, his counsel argued that he had not committed any wrongdoing. However, the prosecution strongly opposed the plea, stating there was substantial evidence to suggest he had committed a serious offence. In her complaint, Rose accused him of making "repeated sexually coloured" remarks towards her. *—PTI*

We thought we were dead: Tirupati stampede survivor

Govt announces Rs 25L ex-gratia to kin of deceased

TIRUPATI, 9 JAN

"For five minutes we thought all of us were dead. I have been coming to the temple for the past 25 years and it has never happened like this," D Venkata Lakshmi said, recounting the horrific Tirupati stampede that killed six persons and left over 40 injured.

Many others who escaped the tragedy on Wednesday night complained about long waiting hours to get tickets for Vaikunta Dwara Darshanam to sudden opening of the gates that prompted the crowd to surge ahead.

On Wednesday night, six devotees died and nearly 40 more were injured in the stampede at Bairagi Patteda near MGM School in Tirupati as hundreds of them jostled for tickets for Vaikunta Dwara Darshanam at Lord Venkateswara Swamy temple on Tirumala Hills.

A male devotee insisted the police were told about the presence of 5,000 devotees.

He claimed that police opened the gates suddenly, leading to the stampede.

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu on Thursday visited the accident site.

Accompanied by several ministers, Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) officials and others, the CM inspected the makeshift arrangements made to handle the multitudes of crowds arriving for the pilgrimage.

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu meets an injured women in the stampede on Wednesday, at SVIMS hospital in Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh, on Thursday PHOTO: PTI

Andhra Pradesh government announced an ex-gratia of Rs 25 lakh each to the kin of the deceased devotees who died in a stampede.

Meanwhile, Senior YSRCP leader and former Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) chairman B Karunakar Reddy on Thursday demanded that Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu should own moral responsibility for the Tirupati stampede and initiate stringent action against the officials responsible.

The Congress' state unit held the TTD that governs the Lord Venkatswara temple, responsible for the tragedy and called for immediate probe into the incident. *—PTI*

HENLEY PASSPORT RANKINGS 2025

The ranking of the world's most powerful passports has been released. Here's a look at it

India's Passport Ranking (2025):

- Up by 5 spots to 80th position
- Provides visa-free access to 62 countries

Global Leaders in Power:

Singapore: Ranked 1st with visa-free access to 195 countries

Japan: Ranked 2nd with visa-free access to 193 countries

EU Nations (3rd position): France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Finland, and South Korea

4th Position: Austria, Denmark, Ireland, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden

5th Position: Belgium, Portugal, Switzerland, the UK, and New Zealand

Falling Passport Rankings:

UK: Diminished from 1st position a decade ago to 5th position

US: Fell to 9th position

Canada: Dropped from 4th to 7th position

Venezuela: Biggest faller, ranked 45th

Rising Passport Rankings: UAE & China

Poor Performing Countries: Pakistan, Yemen and Afghanistan

3 Naxalites killed in Chhattisgarh encounter

RAIPUR/SUKMA, 9 JAN

Three Naxalites were killed in an encounter with security forces in Chhattisgarh's Sukma district on Thursday, state Deputy Chief Minister Vijay Sharma said.

The security forces have achieved success in the anti-Naxal operation in Sukma, he said.

So far, bodies of three Naxalites have been recovered and the search operation is still underway, Sharma, who holds the Home portfolio, told reporters in Raipur.

Referring to the IED blast triggered by Naxalites on 6 January wherein eight security personnel and a civilian driver of their vehicle were killed in Bijapur district, the deputy CM said, "There is huge anger among security forces after what Naxalites have done."

"I have met them (security forces). I reiterate that with the strength and courage of our jawans, the (Naxal) menace will be eliminated within the stipulated time," he said.

9 Naxalites have been killed in encounters so far this year PHOTO: X

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Monday vowed to eliminate Naxals from the country by March 2026 and asserted that the sacrifice of those killed by the extremists in Chhattisgarh will not go in vain.

On Thursday morning, the encounter broke out in a forest along the border of Sukma and Bijapur districts when a joint team of security personnel was out on an anti-Naxalite operation, police said.

With this, nine Naxalites have been killed in separate encounters in the state so far this year. *—PTI*

BOMBAY HC VERDICT

Minor's passport right can't be snatched over parental dispute

MUMBAI, 9 JAN

A minor's right to obtain a passport and travel abroad cannot be taken away merely due to an ongoing matrimonial dispute between parents, the Bombay High Court has said.

The court in its order passed on Wednesday, a copy of which was made available on Thursday, directed the Pune Regional Passport Office (RPO) to issue a passport to the 17-year-old girl within two weeks, observing that the right to travel abroad was a facet of the fundamental right guaranteed in the Constitution.

The RPO had issued a communication to the girl's mother in November 2024, stating that her passport application would not be processed as her father had objected to the same.

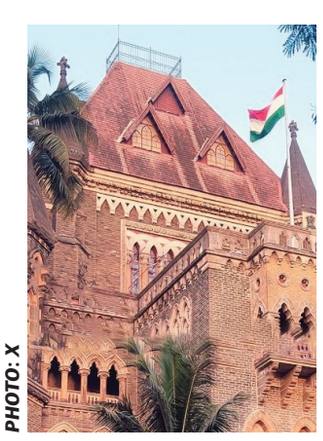


PHOTO: X

As per the plea, the girl's parents are embroiled in divorce proceedings.

In response to the passport office's communication, the girl's mother sent a declaration that the father's consent was missing in the passport issuance form due to a matrimonial dispute.

The high court said in its judgment, "It cannot be that the petitioner's (girl) right to travel abroad by issuance of a passport can in any manner be scuttled and/or taken away by denying her a passport to be issued/re-issued merely for the reason that the father for the only reason that he has disputes with the mother, is not supporting the petitioner's application by consenting to it."

The court said "personal liberty" as mentioned under Article 21 of the Constitution includes the right to travel abroad. *—PTI*

3 tigers, leopard die of avian flu in Nagpur

NAGPUR, 9 JAN

Three tigers and a leopard that died of avian influenza at a rescue centre in Maharashtra's Nagpur district possibly contracted the infection after eating chicken, state Forest Minister Ganesh Naik said on Thursday.

It is, however, yet to be confirmed as the the lab test report has not been received so far, the minister told reporters in Nagpur ahead of his visit to Chandrapur.

Authorities at the zoos concerned have been directed to inspect the food before feeding the animals, he said, adding the facility affected by the incident has been asked to temporarily remain shut.

The three tigers and the leopard had been relocated to the Gorewada Rescue Centre here from Chandrapur following incidents of man-animal conflict.

The big cats died at the centre last month-end. Their samples were sent to Bhopal for testing, and the test reports on 2 January confirmed they were positive for the H5N1 virus, Gorewada project divisional manager Shatanik Bhagwat said. *—PTI*

Protest in Indore against Carbide waste

INDORE, 9 JAN

Several organisations on Thursday protested in Indore against the plan to dispose of 337 tonnes of Union Carbide factory waste at Pithampur in Dhar district, about 30km from Indore city.

The protesters claim that the move poses a threat to the health of the people living in the industrial town and the environment and will also harm the residents of Indore, Madhya Pradesh's financial capital, and its areas.

Protests have erupted at several places since the waste from the Bhopal-based Union Carbide factory, which triggered one of the world's worst industrial disasters, was transported to Pithampur last week for incineration.

Protests have erupted at several places since waste from Union Carbide factory was transported to Pithampur last week for incineration PHOTO: PTI

According to the protesters, the Pithampur industrial area has about 1,250 units that provide jobs to thousands of people from across country.—*PTI*

Assam mine tragedy: Rescue ops enter 4th day

UMRANGSO, 9 JAN

Rescue operations by multiple state and central agencies continued for the fourth day on Thursday to locate miners trapped inside an illegal rat-hole coal mine in Dima Hasao district of Assam, officials said. Four deep divers from the Navy also went inside the flooded shaft, the official said.

A united effort is being made by the Navy, Army, NDRF, SDRF, ONGC, Coal India and district administration to trace the workers trapped inside. *—PTI*

OFFICIALS WARN

Climate change to impact wheat & rice yields up to 10%

NEW DELHI, 9 JAN

India's rice and wheat output is projected to dip by 6–10 per cent due to climate change, impacting access to affordable food for millions, senior officials have said.

Another effect of climate change is that sea water is becoming warmer along the coast, forcing fish to move away to cooler water in deep sea, which has also hit the fishing community, the officials said.

India's wheat production had touched 113.29M tonnes in the 2023–24 crop year, which was about 14 per cent of the global output, while rice harvests topped 137M tonnes. Rice and wheat form staple diet for the country's 1.4B population, 80 per cent of which relies on subsidised food grains supplied through various government schemes.

PHOTO: PTI

"Climate change will reduce the yields of both wheat and rice by 6–10 per cent, significantly impacting farmers and food security of the country," said India Meteorological Department (IMD) Director General Mrutyunjay Mohapatra.

The IMD chief said global warming was also reducing the frequency and strength of Western Disturbances – weather systems emerging from the Mediterranean region that bring winter rain and snow to northwest India.

According to the National Innovations in Climate Resilient Agriculture, wheat yield in India is projected to decline by 6–25 per cent by 2100. *—PTI*

NCLT gets 24 new judicial, technical members

NEW DELHI, 9 JAN

Twenty-four new judicial and technical members have been appointed to the National Company Law Tribunal, a quasi-judicial authority that deals with corporate disputes.

According to a notification issued by the Ministry of Corporate Affairs, the judicial and technical members have been appointed for a period of five years from the date they assume charge or until they attain the age of 65 years.

Among those appointed are Justice Jyotsna Sharma, who will take over as a judicial member and Hariharan Neelakanta Iyer, who will join as technical member, the notification issued on Tuesday said. *—PTI*

Ayodhya gears up for consecration anniversary

AYODHYA, 9 JAN

Preparations are in full swing to celebrate the first anniversary of the consecration of the Ram Lalla idol at the Ram Temple in Ayodhya this weekend.

Scheduled from 11 to 13 January, the celebrations aim to include people who were unable to attend the historic ceremony last year, alongside around 110 invited VIPs, the temple trust said.

A German hangar tent has been installed at the Angad Teela site, capable of hosting up to 5,000 people. Common people will have the opportunity to witness the grand event, which include classical cultural performances, rituals and daily Ram Katha at the pavilion and Yagnashala.

"The trust will invite common people who could not attend the initial consecration ceremony last year. They will be allowed to join all three days of events at Angad Teela," said Champat Rai, the general secretary of the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust.

PHOTO: PTI

The daily schedule features Ram Katha sessions starting at 2 pm, followed by discourses on the Ramcharitmanas (manas pravachan) and cultural performances. Prasad distribution is planned for morning, ensuring that attendees enjoy a devotional and spiritual experience. *—PTI*

FEAST OF JESUS NAZARENO

Devotees pull a glass-covered carriage carrying the image of Jesus Nazareno during its annual procession in Manila, Philippines on Thursday. The event celebrates a centuries-old black statue of Jesus, which many believe holds miraculous powers. The procession marks the feast of Jesus and is a major annual Catholic event in Asia. 1.8 million barefoot Catholic worshippers participated in the procession ***PHOTO: PTI***

H-1B VISA DEBATE SPLITS TRUMP SUPPORTERS

The angry debate over US visas and foreign workers that erupted over the holidays has exposed splits within Donald Trump's group Make America Great Again (MAGA) supporters on immigration policy.

The fiery words exchanged between two Trump factions over H-1B visas, which allow immigrants to work in the US based on speciality talents or skills, may just be the opening salvos of a broader war for influence at Trump's base in Mar-a-Lago.

On the one hand, tech mogul, immigrant, and Trump's (for now) right-hand man Elon Musk declared his strong support for easing restrictions on these visas, pledging that he'd be willing "go to war on this issue the likes of which you cannot possibly comprehend".

On the other hand, former Trump adviser Steve Bannon pilloried the H-1B visa programme as "a total and complete scam from its top to the bottom".

The controversy isn't just an ideological clash between right-wing nativists, who view immigrants as threats to US jobs and culture, and big tech titans eager to expand their access to global talent. Instead, it's a fight for power over the future direction of Trumpism.

"The coalition of the tech right and the nationalist right was bound to be tested," said writer Ali Breland. The test, it seems, has come even before Trump's inauguration on 20 January.

Just like Democrats are dealing with their own fissures between progressives and moderates following the 2024 election, Maga is trying to settle its civil war over Trump's signature issue, immigration.

Silicon Valley, as represented by Musk, has made its position clear. It wants to increase the number of skilled-worker visas to bring more tech talent to America's shores. The policy isn't new. In 2012, former Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney promised to "staple a green card to the diploma of someone who gets an advanced degree in America".

Many within the MAGA are sceptical of unbridled global capitalism, which is reflected in Trump's calls for imposing 10-20 per cent tariffs on US imports and 60 per cent tariffs on imports from China ***PHOTO: PTI***

Yet the very fact that expanding H-1Bs is the "establishment" stance is what has other Maga-ites steaming. Romney isn't exactly the posterboy for the Trumpist revolution. Moreover, in his first administration, Trump himself pushed for restricting H-1B visas, a position he now seems to have revised.

In 2016, Trump railed against H-1B workers who he claimed "substitut(ed) for American workers at lower pay". He has now said: "We need smart people coming into our country. We need a lot of people coming in. We're going to have jobs like we've never had before."

That Trump's recent statements sound a lot like they were coming from Musk is sparking worries among Trump nationalists that Maga's immigration policy is being redefined. For those who believe Musk is influence-peddling for what's best for his corporate bottom line, his proposal on immigration is exhibit A.

Meta is even changing personnel to align with the new Trump White House. The company recently announced that it would be replacing its head of global policy, Nick Clegg, former deputy prime minister of the UK and former leader of the left-leaning Liberal Democratic party, with Joel Kaplan, who has his roots in the George W. Bush administration.

Silicon Valley and Trump anti-immigration nationalists were never natural allies, and any short-lived coalition was already shows signs of fracturing. Yet it's not inevitable that Musk and the big tech leaders who currently have Trump's ear, will retain that clout once his presidency starts – or ends.

As many experts have noted, Trump is more transactional than ideological, and is prone to making decisions based more on polls than a firmly grounded set of first principles. The much-discussed "bromance" between Trump and Musk could rupture over personality or policy differences.

On immigration, Trump might seek a compromise between Maga nationalists and big tech chief executives. Reviving the US-Mexico border wall could appease Maga nationalists who want tighter immigration enforcement.

At the same time, expanding immigration pathways for foreign workers with degrees from the likes of California Institute of Technology and MIT could also help court big tech leaders.

Many within the Maga nationalist right are deeply sceptical of unbridled global capitalism, which is most clearly reflected in Trump's calls for imposing 10-20 per cent tariffs on US imports and 60 per cent tariffs on imports from China.

If there's one policy that could reduce profits, and hence awake the sleeping giants of Palo Alto, it's walling off the US economy from the rest of the world.

—Courtesy, The Conversation

SALAR سالار

Meta drops fact-checking, sparks misinformation fears

Meta has announced it will abandon its fact-checking programme, starting in the United States. It was aimed at preventing the spread of online lies among more than 3 billion people who use Meta's social media platforms, including Facebook, Instagram and Threads. In a video, the company's Chief, Mark Zuckerberg, said fact checking had led to "too much censorship".

He added it was time for Meta "to get back to our roots around free expression", especially following the recent presidential election in the US. Zuckerberg characterised it as a "cultural tipping point, towards once again prioritising speech".

Instead of relying on professional fact checkers to moderate content, the tech giant will now adopt a "community notes" model, similar to the one used by X.

This model relies on other social media users to add context or caveats to a post. It is currently under investigation by the European Union for its effectiveness.

This dramatic shift by Meta does not bode well for the fight against the spread of misinformation and disinformation online.

Meta launched its independent, third-party, fact-checking programme in 2016. As part of the programme, Meta funded fact-checking partners – such as Reuters Fact Check, Australian Associated Press, Agence France-Presse and PolitiFact – to independently assess the validity of problematic content posted on its platforms.

Warning labels were then attached to any content deemed to be inaccurate or misleading. This helped users to be better informed about the content they were seeing online.

Zuckerberg claimed Meta's fact-checking program did not successfully address misinformation on the company's platforms, stifled free speech and lead to widespread censorship.

But the head of the International Fact-Checking Network, Angie Drobnic Holan, said, Fact-checking journalism has never censored or removed posts; it's added information and context to controversial claims, and it's debunked hoax content and conspiracy theories. The fact-checkers used by Meta follow a Code of Principles requiring nonpartisanship and transparency.

In 2023 in Australia alone, Meta displayed warnings on over 9.2 million distinct pieces of content on Facebook (posts, images and videos), and over 510,000 posts on Instagram, including reshares. These warnings were based on articles written by Meta's third-party, fact-checking partners.

Numerous studies have demonstrated that these kinds of warnings effectively slow the spread of misinformation.

Meta's fact-checking policies also required the partner fact-checking organisations to avoid debunking content and opinions from political actors and celebrities and avoid debunking political advertising.

The pandemic demonstrated the usefulness of independent fact checking on Facebook. Fact checkers helped curb much harmful misinformation and disinformation about the virus and the effectiveness of vaccines. Importantly, Meta's fact-checking program also served as a backbone to global efforts to fight misinformation on other social media platforms. It facilitated financial support to up to 90 accredited fact-checking organisations around the world.

Replacing independent, third-party fact checking with a "community notes" model of content moderation is likely to hamper the fight against misinformation and disinformation online.

Last year, for example, reports from The Washington Post and The Centre for Countering Digital Hate in the US found that X's community notes feature was failing to stem the flow of lies on the platform. The tech giant has long been a dominant source of funding for many fact checkers. And it has often incentivised fact checkers to verify certain kinds of claims.

Meta's announcement will now likely force these independent fact checkers to turn away from strings-attached arrangements with private companies in their mission to improve public discourse by addressing online claims.

Yet, without Meta's funding, they will likely be hampered in their efforts to counter attempts to weaponise fact checking by other actors. For example, Russian President Vladimir Putin recently announced the establishment of a state fact-checking network following "Russian values", in stark difference to the International Fact-Checking Network code of principles. This makes independent, third-party fact checking even more necessary. But clearly, Meta doesn't agree. *—Courtesy, The Conversation*

The pandemic demonstrated the usefulness of independent fact checking on Facebook ***PHOTO: PTI***

LETTERS write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

Gaza hostages endure another winter as they plead for ceasefire

When Luis Har was kidnapped by Hamas-led militants on the warm morning of 7 October 2023, he was forced into Gaza wearing shorts and a T-shirt. As his captivity stretched into weeks and then months, the cold, wet winter set in, bringing along with it a dread he had never endured before.

"I felt a penetrating cold in my bones," said Har, 71, who was rescued in mid-February in an Israeli military raid. With no heating in the apartment where he was held, the cold from the floor permeated his thin mattress at night. Fighting outside shattered the apartment windows, sending in rain and wind.

While Har is spending this winter warm and free, dozens of hostages still in captivity are not. Their families and supporters are desperate for a ceasefire deal to bring an end to their 15-month-long nightmare.

"Winter makes it much harder, much more complicated," said Har. "They must return as quickly as possible."

The hostages often experience the same dire circumstances as hundreds of thousands of Palestinians in Gaza, whether it be food scarcity, the dangers from Israeli bombardments or the winter. The war in Gaza, sparked by Hamas' attack, has displaced most of Gaza's 2.3 million population, many of whom are weathering a second winter in tents that are barely holding up against the wind, rain and temperatures that can drop below 10 degrees Celsius at night.

Israel and Hamas are considering a deal that would free some hostages in exchange for Palestinians imprisoned by Israel and a halt to the fighting in Gaza. But despite reports of progress, the families of hostages have been shattered by previous rounds of promising talks that have suddenly collapsed. They fear the same could happen now.

"It is a dagger in our hearts," said Ofri Bibas Levy, about the rollercoaster of hope and despair the families have lived throughout the war. Bibas Levy's brother, Yarden Bibas, along with his wife Shiri and sons Ariel, 5, and Kfir, 1, are being held in Gaza. "Either it happens now or it doesn't happen at all," she told Israeli Army Radio.

During its attack on southern Israel, Hamas killed 1,200 people and kidnapped about 250, more than 100 of whom were freed in a brief ceasefire in the early weeks of the war. Since then, Israel has killed more than 45,000 people in Gaza, more than half of them women and children, according to

Israelis protest for the release of hostages in the Gaza Strip outside the Prime Minister Bejamin Netanyahu's office in Jerusalem ***PHOTO: PTI***

Gaza's Health Ministry, which doesn't distinguish between fighters and noncombatants in its count.

Of the roughly 100 hostages who remain in Gaza, one third are said to be dead, some killed during Hamas' initial attack and others killed or having died in captivity. Israel has rescued eight hostages and has recovered the bodies of dozens.

The hostages range in age from 1 to 86, and are believed to be scattered throughout the Gaza Strip. They have been held in apartments or in Hamas' web of underground tunnels, which are cramped, damp and stifling, according to testimony from freed hostages.

Many families have no idea what conditions their loved ones face, uncertainty that heightens their concern.

"You see a rainy day, or a cold day or whatever is going on outside, a storm, and it kills you," said Michael Levy, whose brother Or, 34, was captured from an outdoor music festival after his wife was killed by militants, leaving their now 3-year-old son, Almog, without his parents.

Yehonatan Sabban, a spokesperson for the Hostages Families Forum, said the hostages are undernourished, with low fat reserves and weakened immune systems, making them more vulnerable to complications from illness in winter.

"Everyone is in a life-threatening situation that demands their immediate release," Sabban said.

Har said the conditions of his captivity worsened during winter. For weeks, he had been held with four members of his family who had also been kidnapped — along with a Shih Tzu smuggled in by one of them. Three of them and the dog were freed in the first and only ceasefire agreement in late November. That left Har and his relative Fernando Marman alone with their captors in a second-floor apartment in the southern Gaza city of Rafah.

Har pled with his captors, who wore heavy coats, to bring them warmer clothes. They did — although they were ridden with holes. Every 10 days or so, they washed themselves with water from a bucket. A shattered window was sealed with a tarp.

In the first few weeks of captivity, there was food. Ingredients were delivered and Har took on the role of chef. When there were tomatoes, he made tomato soup with some rice. With canned peas, he made pea soup. But as the war dragged on and the temperature dropped, food became scarce. They were delighted when a captor brought one egg for them to share. For weeks, he and Marman split a single pita a day.

When he was rescued in a nighttime operation in mid-February, he ran shoeless out of the apartment and into a nearby greenhouse. Soldiers gave him a pair of shoes and a coat and spirited him home. The raid killed about 70 Palestinians, according to local authorities.

The families of the remaining hostages are pinning their hopes on the latest round of ceasefire talks.

All I have is to pray that he's somehow OK," Levy said of his brother's fate, "and know that the human spirit is stronger than anything." *—PTI*

51st state jokes not funny anymore: Canada

Trump says he won't use military force to invade the country

TORONTO, 9 JAN

US President-elect Donald Trump's comments that Canada should become the 51st state are no longer a joke and are meant to undermine America's closest ally, Canada's finance minister said.

Dominic LeBlanc, the country's point person for US-Canada relations, said Trump was smiling when he first made the comment during a dinner at Mar-a-Lago with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau in late November.

"The joke is over," said LeBlanc. "It's a way for him, I think, to sow confusion, to agitate people, to create chaos knowing this will never happen."

Trump keeps floating the idea that Canada should join the United States as the 51st state, saying on Tuesday he would not use military force to invade the country, which is home to more than 40 million people and is a founding NATO partner.

Instead, Trump said he would rely on "economic force" as he erroneously cast the US trade deficit with Canada — a natural resource-rich nation that provides the US with commodities like oil — as a subsidy.

"It's becoming very counter-productive," LeBlanc said, referring to Trump's rhetoric about Canada.

LeBlanc has been talking to incoming Trump administration officials about increasing border security in an effort to avoid a sweeping 25 per cent tariff that Trump has threatened to impose on all Canadian products. LeBlanc, recently appointed to the role after the abrupt resignation of the previous finance minister, also announced he won't run to replace Trudeau so he can focus on the tariff threat. Trudeau announced on Monday he will resign as prime minister and will stay on until a new Liberal leader is chosen. —*PTI*

Canadian leaders arrive for a Liberal caucus meeting in Ottawa on Thursday **PHOTO: X**

Legislation to revoke Pak's non NATO ally status

WASHINGTON, 9 JAN

Congressman Andy Biggs, an influential Republican and Chairman of the House Judiciary Committee's Subcommittee on Crime and Federal Government Surveillance, has reintroduced legislation in the US House of Representatives to revoke Pakistan's designation as a major non-NATO ally. The bill stipulates that the President must certify Pakistan's military operations are significantly disrupting the Haqqani Network's activities. It requires proof that Islamabad is taking steps to prevent the Haqqani Network from using Pakistan as a base and is actively collaborating with the Afghan government to curb militants. —*PTI*

SL monk sentenced for Islamophobic remarks

COLOMBO, 9 JAN

Galagoda Aththe Gnanasara, a prominent hardliner monk in Sri Lanka, has been sentenced to nine months in prison by the Colombo Magistrate's Court for Islamophobic comments made in 2016. The Additional Magistrate, Pasan Amarasena, also imposed a fine of Rs 1,500. This latest ruling follows a four-year prison sentence handed down by the High Court in March 2022, which was later reduced upon appeal.Gnanasara, who has led an anti-Muslim campaign through his organisation, the Bodu Bala Sena (BBS), has long faced backlash for his inflammatory rhetoric. Today's sentence was issued due to his previous failure to attend court. Despite delivering a public apology to the Muslim community for his earlier remarks, the High Court found that his comments had significantly contributed to religious and communal discord in the country. In 2018, he was briefly arrested for contempt of court before receiving a presidential pardon. —*PTI*

16 labourers abducted in Pak's KP province

PESHAWAR, 9 JAN

In a troubling incident, at least 16 labourers were kidnapped by unidentified armed men in Pakistan's volatile Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province on Thursday, according to local police. The labourers, who were en route to a government construction site, were abducted from their vehicle, which the assailants later set ablaze in the Qabal Khel area. As of now, no group has claimed responsibility for the abduction. In a separate incident, a bomb disposal unit successfully neutralised a 25-kilogram explosive device that had been planted near the Mehboob Ziarat check-post in Tank district, aimed at targeting a moving convoy of security forces, local authorities reported. —*PTI*

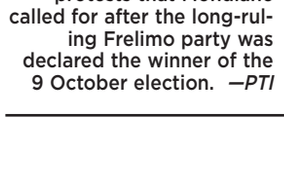


PHOTO: X

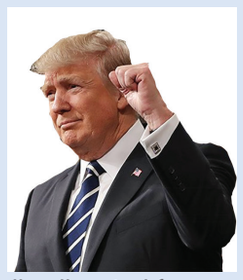
Mozambique opposition leader back from exile

MAPUTO, 9 JAN

Mozambique's main opposition leader returned from exile on Thursday as security forces fired tear gas at hundreds of his supporters who gathered near the main international airport to welcome him home. Venancio Mondlane was seen walking off a plane at Mavalane International Airport in the capital, Maputo. He had left the country in October, following a disputed election. Mondlane said he left Mozambique fearing for his life after two senior members of his party were killed in the aftermath of the election. Security forces killed more than 100 people since Mozambique erupted in protests that Mondlane called for after the long-ruling Frelimo party was declared the winner of the 9 October election. —*PTI*

Trump's committee raises record USD 170M

WASHINGTON, 9 JAN



President-elect Donald Trump has raised over £170 million for his upcoming inauguration, setting a record as tech executives and major donors enthusiastically contribute large sums. Sources indicate that the inaugural committee is expected to exceed £200 million by the end of its fundraising. The donations are typically allocated for expenses related to the inauguration events, including the oath of office ceremony, parade, and inaugural balls. Unspent funds are likely to support a future Trump presidential library. This amount far surpasses the nearly USD62 million raised by President Joe Biden for his inauguration four years ago. Donations to Trump's first inauguration in 2016 also set a record when he brought in nearly USD 107 million. After his victory in November major donors, including tech companies, have been writing big checks as they've sought to improve their relationship with the incoming president. —*PTI*

Biden still thinks he would have beaten Trump

WASHINGTON DC, 9 JAN

US President Biden insisted in a new interview said that he could have beaten president-elect Trump in the 2024 election, even as he admitted he was unsure that he had the stamina for another term.

Many Democrats have expressed anger at Biden's decision to seek re-election initially despite polls showing voters across the political spectrum expressing concerns about his age. Biden said his belief was based on polling. However, Biden was more circumspect when asked if he had the vigour to serve another four years in office, admitting: "I don't know." "Who the hell knows? So far, so good. But who knows what I'm going to be when I'm 86 years old?" the president added in the interview, which was conducted Sunday. —*Axios*

Joseph Aoun was widely seen as the preferred candidate of the United States and Saudi Arabia **PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA**

Lebanon chooses army commander Aoun as president

BEIRUT, 9 JAN

Lebanon's parliament voted Thursday to elect the country's army commander, Joseph Aoun, as head of state, filling a more than two-year-long presidential vacuum.

The vote came weeks after a tenuous ceasefire agreement halted a 14-month conflict between Israel and the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah and at a time when Lebanon's leaders are seeking international assistance for reconstruction.

Aoun, no relation to former president Michel Aoun, was widely seen as the preferred candidate of the United States and Saudi Arabia, whose assistance Lebanon will need as it seeks to rebuild after between Israel and the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah.

The session was the legislature's 13th attempt to elect a successor to Michel Aoun, whose term ended in October 2022.

Hezbollah previously backed another candidate, Suleiman Frangieh, the leader of a small Christian party in northern Lebanon with close ties to former Syrian President Bashar Assad. However, on Wednesday, Frangieh announced he had withdrawn from the race and endorsed Aoun, clearing the way for the army chief.

Randa Slim, a senior fellow at the Washington, DC-based Middle East Institute, said that the military and political weakening of Hezbollah following its war with Israel and the fall of its ally, Assad, in Syria, along with international pressure to elect a president paved the way for Thursday's result.

In a first round of voting Thursday, Aoun received 71 out of 128 votes but fell short of the two-thirds majority needed to win outright. Of the rest, 37 lawmakers cast blank ballots and 14 voted for "sovereignty and the constitution." In the second round, he received 99 votes. The president's role in Lebanon is limited under the power-sharing system in which the president is always a Maronite Christian, the prime minister a Sunni Muslim and the speaker of parliament Shiite. —*PTI*

MILITANT ENTRY IN SYRIAN MILITARY WORRIES CHINA

BEIJING, 9 JAN

China said it is greatly concerned over the new Syrian government appointing foreign terrorist fighters, especially from the banned Uygur militant group East Turkestan Islamic Movement, to senior military ranks.

The East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) is active in China's volatile Xinjiang province.

These remarks were made by Fu Cong, China's permanent representative to the UN, at a UN Security Council briefing on Syria on Wednesday.

China is greatly concerned about the reports that said the Syrian Army has recently granted senior military ranks to a number of foreign terrorist fighters, including the head of Council, a listed terrorist organisation, the Turkistan Islamic Party, also known as the ETIM, Cong said.

Meanwhile, Taiwan on Thursday demonstrated its sea defences against a potential Chinese attack as tensions rise with Beijing, part of a multitiered strategy to deter an invasion from the mainland. The island's navy highlighted missile boats and corvettes in waters near port of Kaohsiung. —*PTI*

US revokes Indian doc's license for exploitation

WASHINGTON, 9 JAN

The medical license of an Indian American physician has been permanently revoked for illegally recruiting and harbouring two Indian women to be household servants for low pay.

Dr Harsha Sahni, who maintained a rheumatology practice in Colonia, New Jersey, pleaded guilty to federal charges of conspiracy to conceal and harbour aliens and filing a false tax return last February.

She is scheduled to begin serving a 27-month prison sentence handed down by a federal court judge in October 2024, Attorney General Matthew J Platkin and the Division of Consumer Affairs announced on Wednesday.

Sahni had been temporarily suspended from the practice of medicine since September 2023, as the State pursued an administrative action to revoke her license in the wake of her criminal plea.

"The revocation announced today brings closure to a disturbing case in which a physician sworn to uphold the highest standards of care and compassion exploited victims for her own financial gain," Attorney General Platkin said."There is no place in the medical profession for this kind of criminal conduct and utter disregard for humanity," Platkin said.

"Dr Sahni's treatment of the women violated the most basic rules of the medical profession," said Cari Fais, the director of the Division of Consumer Affairs. —*PTI*

Attack on Chad's presidential palace leaves 19 dead

N'DJAMENA, 9 JAN

An attack on Chad's presidential palace left 18 assailants dead and six in custody, with one soldier killed and three wounded, state media reported Thursday.

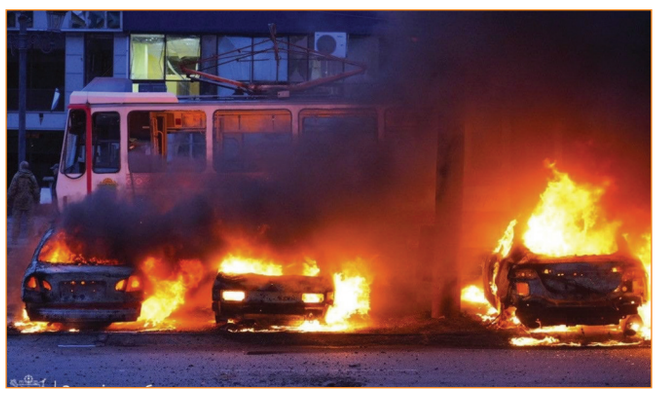
The attack on Wednesday night occurred while Chadian President Mahamat Deby Itno was inside the palace, but authorities said the situation was quickly brought under control.

"The situation is completely under control. There is no fear," Foreign Affairs Minister Abderaman Koulamallah said while surrounded by soldiers in a live Facebook broadcast filmed inside what appeared to be a quiet presidential palace late Wednesday.

Rumours spread online that the attack was the work of Islamic militant group Boko Haram **PHOTO: X**

Rumours spread online that the attack was the work of Islamic militant group Boko Haram. —*PTI*

Russian missile kills 13 in South Ukraine



Cars burn after a Russian air strike in Zaporizhzhia, Ukrain **PHOTO: PTI**

KYIV, 9 JAN

A daytime Russian missile attack on the southern Ukraine city of Zaporizhzhia killed at least 13 civilians and wounded about 30 others on Wednesday, officials said.

Footage posted on Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's Telegram channel shows civilians lying on a street littered with debris and being treated by emergency services and taken away on gurneys. Russian has frequently launched aerial attacks on civilian areas during the almost three-year war. Thousands of civilians have been killed in Europe's biggest conflict since World War II. Zelenskyy and regional Gov. Ivan Fedorov said Wednesday's attack killed at least 13 civilians. Minutes before the attack, Fedorov had warned of a threat of high-speed missiles and devastating glide bombs being fired at the Zaporizhzhia region.

Russian troops started launching the glide bombs at Zaporizhzhia in the middle of the afternoon, and at least two bombs struck residential buildings in the city, Fedorov said. —*PTI*

CALIFORNIA BURNS

People asked to evacuate as LA fire rages on

Residents embrace outside of a burning property as the Eaton Fire swept through Thursday in Altadena; Firefighters protect a structure as the Eaton Fire advances **PHOTOS: PTI**

LOS ANGELES, 9 JAN

Fierce wildfires are raging in the Los Angeles area, fuelled by powerful Santa Ana winds, sending residents fleeing from burning homes through flames, ferocious winds and towering clouds of smoke. Thousands of firefighters were battling at least three separate blazes on Wednesday, from the Pacific Coast inland to Pasadena. One of the fires was the most destructive in the modern history of the city of LA.

Thousands have been notified by authorities to evacuate their homes because of the multiple fires burning in the Los Angeles region. Officials say at least five people have died in the wildfires. The most recent mandatory evacuations orders came on Wednesday evening related to the Sunset fire, a new fire in the Hollywood Hills. Mandatory evacuation orders also remained in place near the Palisades fire west of Los Angeles, including parts of Santa Monica. Uber is offering free rides up to USD40 to active evacuation centers using the code WILDFIRE25, according to LA County Supervisor Lindsay Horvath. —*PTI*

NATURE DOESN'T DIFFERENTIATE CELEBRITIES

Here are the Hollywood stars who lost their houses to the raging wildfire in California

Mandy Moore
Lost her home in the Altadena neighborhood near Pasadena. The fire also destroyed her children's school

Adam Brody and Leighton Meester
Lost their $6.5 million home

Paris Hilton
Lost her $8.4 million home in Malibu

Anna Faris
Lost her home in the Pacific Palisades.

Sir Anthony Hopkins
Reportedly lost his $6million home

Quick commerce boosts blue-collar jobs in India

India to see demand for 2.4 million jobs by 2027

NEW DELHI, 9 JAN

The rapid rise of quick commerce is anticipated to create a substantial increase in the need for blue-collar workers, with India projected to require 2.4 million jobs by 2027, according to job matching and hiring platform Indeed.

Quick commerce companies hired over 40,000 employees in the last quarter to handle increased festive shopping and e-commerce demand, Indeed India Sales Head Sashi Kumar said.

"The quick commerce industry in India is on a rapid growth trajectory, and we're seeing a significant shift in how blue-collar hiring is evolving to meet this demand.

"As the industry continues to expand, the need for skilled and semi-skilled workers is growing, making hiring more competitive. Employers are increasingly looking for talent that can adapt to a fast-paced, technology-driven environment," he told PTI.

Quick commerce companies hired over 40,000 employees in the last quarter to handle increased festive shopping **PHOTO: PTI**

Blue-collar jobs refer to occupations that involve manual labour or skilled trades. These roles often require physical work and hands-on training and experience rather than formal education.

The average monthly base salary for these roles, including delivery drivers and retail staff, is about Rs 22,600, according to a survey by Indeed.

"India will need 2.43 million blue-collar workers across various industries. Among this, the quick commerce sector alone is set to create half a million new jobs and lead the way," the survey said.

During peak seasons, workers often benefit from increased earnings through bonuses. Additionally, many companies provide non-monetary perks, such as smartphones, and referral rewards, the study said.

The primary roles that quick commerce companies recruited for during the festive season included delivery drivers, warehouse associates, marketing and promotional personnel, packaging workers, and logistics coordinators.

The top five skills employers identified as high priorities are navigation and driving, digital literacy, data analysis, management, and tech support to increase efficiency and scalability in the workforce. The adoption of automation and digital tools is also shaping the types of skills needed for these roles.

The rise in blue-collar jobs within the quick commerce industry is mainly fuelled by the growing demand for rapid delivery services. Customers expect goods, especially groceries and essentials, to be delivered within minutes. *—PTI*

Gold rises by ₹300 to ₹80,300 per 10 grams

MUMBAI, 9 JAN

Gold price climbed Rs 300 for a third consecutive session to Rs 80,300 per 10 grams in the national capital on Thursday amid strong global cues, according to the All India Sarafa Association. Traders said the precious metal surged, following news that People's Bank of China (PBoC) increased its reserves for the second consecutive month. In the previous session, the yellow metal of 99.9 per cent purity ended at Rs 80,000 per 10 grams. The price of gold of 99.5 per cent purity rose Rs 300 to Rs 79,900 per 10 grams on Thursday. Silver rose by Rs 500 to Rs 93,000 per kg from the previous close of Rs 92,500 per kg on Wednesday. Additionally, gold contracts for February delivery climbed Rs 247 or 0.32 per cent to Rs 77,994 per 10 grams in futures trade on the MCX. Globally, Comex gold futures rose USD 10 per ounce or 0.37 per cent to USD 2,682.40 per ounce. *—PTI*

Rupee recovers from record low to settle 4P at 85.87

MUMBAI, 9 JAN

The rupee recovered slightly from its record low and settled with a gain of 4 paise at 85.87 (provisional) against the US dollar on Thursday amid firm American currency and elevated level of crude oil prices. According to forex analysts, relentless selling in domestic equities and outflow of foreign capital kept the local unit under pressure, while dollar strengthened on improved macroeconomic prospects in the US. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at its historic low level of 85.94 and touched an intra-day peak of 85.84 before ending the session at 85.87 (provisional) against the greenback, 4 paise higher from its previous close. On Wednesday, the rupee plunged 17 paise to settle at its all-time low closing level of 85.91 against the dollar*—PTI*

Tata Motors group global wholesales up 1% in Q3

NEW DELHI, 9 JAN

Tata Motors on Thursday reported a 1 per cent rise at 3,41,791 units in group global wholesales, including that of British arm JLR, in the third quarter ended December 2024. Global wholesales of Tata Motors passenger vehicles, including electric vehicles, in Q3 FY25 were 1,39,829 units, higher by 1 per cent compared to Q3 FY24, Tata Motors said in a regulatory filing. For Jaguar Land Rover, global wholesales excluding that of CJLR -- a joint venture between JLR and Chery Automobiles in China, stood at 1,04,427 units, up 3 per cent compared to the year-ago period, it added. The global wholesales of all Tata Motors' commercial vehicles and Tata Daewoo range in Q3 FY25 were 97,535 units, down 1 per cent from the third quarter of FY24, the filing said *—PTI*

Mercedes reports best ever yearly sales in 2024

PUNE, 9 JAN

Luxury carmaker Mercedes-Benz India plans to roll out 8 new models, including battery electric vehicles, this year as it looks to sustain sales momentum having posted record sales in 2024. The company sold 19,565 units last year, registering a growth of 12 per cent as compared to 17,408 units in 2023. Mercedes also saw sales of battery electric vehicles almost doubled in 2024 as compared to 2023. The company said one out of the four vehicles it sold last year was a top end vehicle (TEV) with a price tag exceeding Rs 1.5 crore. The company introduced 14 new models last year in India. Mercedes-Benz on Thursday launched two battery electric vehicles -- the G580 with EQ technology Edition One and locally produced EQS SUV 450 (five-seat configuration). *—PTI*

COMPENSATION FOR LOSS

Govt to give ₹35K cr LPG subsidy to IOC, BPCL and HPCL

NEW DELHI, 9 JAN

PHOTO: PTI

The government is likely to provide a subsidy of Rs 35,000 crore to state-owned Indian Oil Corporation Ltd (IOC), Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd (BPCL), and Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd (HPCL) to make up for losses they incurred on selling the fuel this fiscal, sources said.

The three fuel retailers have kept the price of domestic LPG unchanged at Rs 803 per 14.2-kg cylinder since March 2024 despite a rise in input raw material cost. This led to under-recoveries on LPG sales, and the resultant drastic fall in their earnings in the April-September (first half of current 2024-25 fiscal year).

The total under-recovery on LPG sales for the industry in the current fiscal is estimated at about Rs 40,500 crore. Against this, the government is likely to provide Rs 35,000 crore in total spread over two financial years, two sources with knowledge of the matter said.

IOC, BPCL and HPCL are likely to get Rs 10,000 crore during the current 2024-25 fiscal and the remaining Rs 25,000 crore in the next, they said, adding that provision of the subsidy is likely to be made in the Union Budget for 2025-26 on 1 February.

Sources said there is an under-recovery (or loss) of about Rs 240 per 14.2-kg cylinder that the state-owned fuel retailers sell to domestic households at the current price of Rs 803. *—PTI*

SENSEX DROPS 528.28 PTS

Mkts tumble 1% on unabated foreign fund outflows

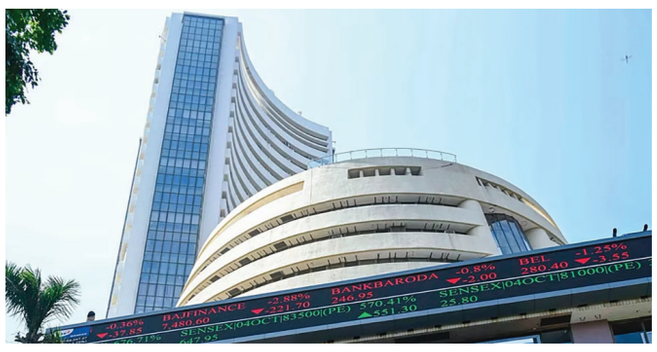
MUMBAI, 9 JAN

Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty tumbled nearly 1 per cent on Thursday due to heavy selling in market heavyweights HDFC Bank, TCS and Reliance as investors turned nervous over earnings growth concerns amid unabated foreign capital outflows.

Besides, abysmally low Chinese inflation data, an indication of poor demand, and a sell-off in US bonds added to the pressure, traders said.

TCS is kick-starting the December quarter results calendar on Thursday.

Falling for the second straight day, the 30-share benchmark dropped 528.28 points or 0.68 per cent to sink below the 78,000 level at 77,620.21. During the day, it tanked 605.57 points or 0.77 per cent to 77,542.92.



NSE Nifty slumps 162.45 points or 0.69 per cent to 23,526.50 **PHOTO: PTI**

The NSE Nifty slumped 162.45 points or 0.69 per cent to 23,526.50.

From the 30-share Sensex blue-chip pack, Tata Steel, Zomato, Larsen & Toubro, Tata Motors, Adani Ports, Tata Consultancy Services, HDFC Bank and NTPC were the major laggards.

Nestle, Hindustan Unilever, Mahindra & Mahindra, Kotak Mahindra Bank, Asian Paints and Bharti Airtel were among the gainers.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 3,362.18 crore on Wednesday, according to exchange data.

The BSE benchmark declined 50.62 points or 0.06 per cent to settle at 78,148.49 on Wednesday. *—PTI*

Swiggy launches 'Swiggy Serves' to tackle hunger

BENGALURU, 9 JAN

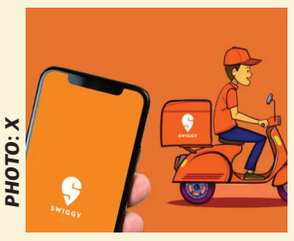


PHOTO: X

Swiggy has partnered with the Robin Hood Army, an NGO focused on tackling hunger through surplus food distribution, to combat food wastage and hunger. The collaboration, announced on Thursday, aims to distribute 50 million meals by 2030 through Swiggy Serves, a new initiative.

Meanwhile, Swiggy has launched a third app, Pyng, marking its expansion into the professional services marketplace. The development follows the launch of Snacc, a food delivery app by Swiggy

Currently in its pilot phase, Pyng will enable professionals such as fitness coaches, yoga instructors, dance instructors, language learning, and education coaches to list their services on the platform.

Swiggy has already partnered with over 80 per cent of restaurants across the country, including popular chains like Dana Choga, Biryani by Kilo, Dosa Anna, Charcoal Eats, Urban Tandoor, and Foodies Cart, with plans for expansion.

In a similar vein, Swiggy previously partnered with the makers of Singham Again in October 2024 to set a Guinness World Record by delivering 11,000 vada pavs to children supported by the Robin Hood Army.

Meanwhile, Zomato, introduced a feature in November 2024 called Food Rescue, which helps reduce food wastage by offering cancelled orders at lesser prices.*—Agencies*

TV Today's radio business 104.8 FM to shut in 6 mnts

NEW DELHI, 9 JAN

Media house TV Today Network on Thursday announced that it will shut down its radio business, operated under the brand name Ishq 104.8 FM, in the next six months, citing current market dynamics.

The board of the company in a meeting held on Thursday approved the proposal for the closure of the FM radio business, according to a regulatory filing by TV Today Network Ltd.

TV Today Network currently operates three FM radio stations in Mumbai, Delhi and Kolkata under the frequency 104.8 FM, which contributed 1.7 per cent of its revenue in FY24

The radio business is expected to be closed in nearly one to six months, TV Today Network added further.

The radio business turnover was at Rs 16.18 crore and registered a loss of Rs 19.53 crore in the financial year ended March 2024. *—PTI*

Equity MF inflows up 14%; record small/mid-cap bets

MUMBAI, 9 JAN

PHOTO: PTI

Inflows into mutual fund equity schemes rose by over 14 per cent month-on-month to reach Rs 41,156 crore in December, even amid ongoing market fluctuations. The small and midcap schemes saw unprecedented investor interest, reflecting a strong confidence in these sectors, as reported by the Association of Mutual Funds in India (AMFI).

Systematic Investment Plans (SIPs) drew Rs 26,459 crore, up from Rs 25,320 crore in November. SIPs now represent around a fifth of the total Rs 13.63 lakh crore in assets under management. Overall, the mutual fund industry's assets stood at Rs 66.93 lakh crore on 31 December, a decrease from Rs 68.08 lakh crore the previous month.

Venkat Chalasani, CEO of AMFI, noted that the decline was primarily due to mark-to-market losses and significant outflows of Rs 1.27 lakh crore from debt schemes, typical at the end of a quarter. Notable inflows came from sectoral and thematic funds, which attracted Rs 15,331 crore, almost doubling from November's Rs 7,658 crore.

Meanwhile, gold exchange-traded funds continued to struggle, recording just 640 crore in inflows for the seventh straight month. Despite uncertainties, Chalasani expressed optimism about the long-term faith of Indian investors in the equity market. *—PTI*

Revenue Secy Arunish Chawla joins DIPAM ahead of Budget

NEW DELHI, 9 JAN

In a significant reshuffle within the Finance Ministry, senior Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer Arunish Chawla has been reassigned from his role as revenue secretary to lead the Department of Investment and Public Asset Management (DIPAM). This change comes just three weeks before the presentation of the Union Budget.

Tuhin Kanta Pandey, who previously served as DIPAM secretary, is set to take over as the new revenue secretary, as per an order issued by the personnel ministry. Pandey currently also holds the position of finance secretary.

These alterations within the ministry occur at a critical juncture as officials prepare for the Union Budget, which is scheduled to be unveiled on 1 February. Wednesday's reshuffle is viewed as part of the government's strategic realignments in anticipation of this key financial planning period.

- These alterations within the ministry occur at a critical juncture as officials prepare for the Union Budget, which is scheduled to be unveiled on 1 February

Chawla, appointed as revenue secretary only on 25 December last year, previously held the position of Secretary in the Department of Pharmaceuticals. In his new role, he will also temporarily oversee the responsibilities of Secretary for the Department of Public Enterprises and Secretary for the Ministry of Culture until a permanent replacement is appointed.

Pandey, a 1987-batch IAS officer hailing from the Odisha cadre, was already managing the additional responsibilities of Secretary for the Department of Public Enterprises. *—PTI*

New credit scheme soon for MSMEs up to ₹100 crore

NEW DELHI, 9 JAN

The Indian government is set to launch a new credit guarantee scheme aimed at the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) sector, allowing loans up to Rs 100 crore without requiring collateral. Financial Services Secretary M. Nagaraju revealed that this initiative, announced by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in the last Budget, will soon be submitted to the Union Cabinet for approval.

The scheme will facilitate term loans for MSMEs to acquire machinery and equipment, operating on a pooled credit risk model. A self-financing guarantee fund will offer cover for up to Rs 100 crore, with the loan amount potentially exceeding this limit. Borrowers will need to pay an upfront guarantee fee and an annual fee based on the reducing loan balance. *—PTI*

TO EASE RESTRICTIONS

Meta rolls back hate speech rules after US polls

WASHINGTON, 9 JAN

PHOTO: PTI

Meta has made significant changes to its hate speech policies across its platforms, raising alarm among advocates for vulnerable communities. This decision, which follows a trend initiated by Elon Musk's X, aims to loosen restrictions on content related to sexual orientation, gender identity, and immigration status. Critics warn that the reduced content moderation could result in real-world harm.

CEO Mark Zuckerberg announced on Tuesday that the company would "remove restrictions on topics like immigration and gender that are out of touch with mainstream discourse," linking the move to recent elections. Consequently, users are now permitted to make unsubstantiated allegations of mental illness against individuals based on their gender or sexual orientation. Other forms of hate speech, including Blackface and Holocaust denial, remain banned.

Ben Leiner, a lecturer at the University of Virginia's Darden School of Business, suggested that the policy changes serve to curry favour with the incoming administration while also cutting costs related to content moderation. He cautioned that this reduction in protective measures could exacerbate the already heightened incidents of hate speech and disinformation on social media. Former Meta engineering director Arturo Béjar expressed particular concern over the changes that will now see the company relying on user reports rather than proactive enforcement to address self-harm, bullying, and harassment. He opined that Meta's decision undermines its responsibility to maintain user safety, particularly for young people, and fears the impact of these policy changes may not be fully realised until it's late. *—PTI*

Meta allows FB users to access eBay listings

SAN FRANCISCO, 9 JAN

PHOTO: X

- Meta has announced a trial allowing select Facebook users in Germany, France, and the United States

Meta has announced a trial allowing select Facebook users in Germany, France, and the United States to view eBay listings directly on its Marketplace platform, while transactions will be completed on eBay. This move follows a hefty fine of almost 800 million ($824 million) imposed by the European Union for alleged anticompetitive practices regarding Marketplace.

The European Commission accused Meta of unfairly restricting competition by linking Marketplace to Facebook and using advertising data to gain an advantage. eBay shares surged following the announcement, with the platform stating that a range of listings will be integrated, offering users the same protections as direct purchases on its website *—PTI*

PHOTO:X

Cummins to undergo scan ahead of Champions Trophy

SYDNEY, 9 JAN

An injury concern looms over Australian skipper Pat Cummins ahead of next month's Champions Trophy with the pacer set to undergo a scan on his "sore ankle", and chairman of selectors George Bailey refusing to confirm his availability for the marquee event. Cummins has been troubled by the ankle issue throughout the Australian summer but managed to guide his team to a 3-1 victory over India in the marquee Border-Gavaskar Test series recently. Bailey did not commit whether Cummins was a certainty for the Champions Trophy, starting on 19 February. Australia announced its squad for the two-Test away series against Sri Lanka. *—PTI*

SA sports minister urges boycott of Af cricket match

PRETORIA, 9 JAN

South Africa's sports minister has joined public calls for the Proteas to boycott the Champions Trophy game against Afghanistan next month and criticised the International Cricket Council for not upholding its own rules. Gayton McKenzie said on Thursday he felt "morally bound to support" a match boycott because the Taliban government has banned women's sport and disbanded the national women's cricket team. The Proteas are scheduled to play Afghanistan on 21 February in a group match in Karachi, Pakistan. *—PTI*

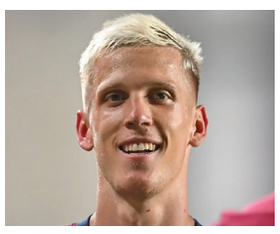


PHOTO:X

Spain allows Dani to continue playing for Barcelona

MADRID, 9 JAN

Spain's government stepped in Wednesday to provisionally allow midfielder Dani Olmo and forward Pau Víctor to continue playing for Barcelona following the Spanish league's refusal to do so. Barcelona appealed the decision by the league to Spain's Higher Council for Sport, a government body under the auspices of the ministry of education and sports. The council has initially ruled in Barcelona's favor to allow the two players to continue participating in official competitions while it studies the appeal and makes a definitive ruling. Last summer, the two players were registered only through the end of 2024, and the financially troubled Barcelona failed to meet the league's financial fair-play rules by the end-of-year deadline. *—PTI*

US delays funding for WADA amid growing dispute

WASHINGTON, 9 JAN

The US government did not pay the more than $3.6 million due to the World Anti-Doping Agency in 2024, making good on a long-running threat anchored in unhappiness with the global watchdog's handling of cases involving Chinese swimmers and others. Those funds, normally distributed by the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy, represent about 6 per cent of WADA's annual budget. WADA statutes say representatives of countries that don't pay are not eligible to sit on the agency's top decision-making panels. US drug czar Rahul Gupta is listed as a member of the WADA executive committee. The US contribution is double that of Canada, the home country for WADA that puts in the second most money among the more than 180 countries that contribute. *—PTI*

India eye dominance in ODI series against Ireland

Women's team are riding high from successful West Indies series

RAJKOT, 9 JAN

Riding high on a dominant performance against the West Indies, India under Smriti Mandhana will look to carry forward their winning momentum when they take on Ireland in the first-ever women's bilateral series, with the opening ODI scheduled here on Friday.

India had swept the West Indies 3-0 in the ODI series, following a 2-1 triumph in the T20 series. Mandhana emerged as the top run-scorer across formats, scoring 148 runs in the ODI series, including two half-centuries, and 193 runs in the T20s, with three successive fifties.

With Kaur and Renuka missing, the responsibility shifts to the rest of the batters, including Harleen Deol, Pratika Rawal, and Jemimah Rodrigues, to step up.

India had swept the West Indies 3-0 in the ODI series, following a 2-1 triumph in the T20 series *PHOTO: ANI*

Deol was the top scorer in the ODI series with 160 runs, including a brilliant 115, while Rawal and Rodrigues also had solid outings, scoring 134 and 112 runs, respectively, with a fifty each in the ODIs.

In the bowling department, Renuka's absence will be felt as she was the leading wicket-taker with 10 wickets in the ODI series against the West Indies.

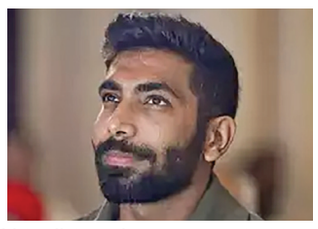
The onus will now fall on newcomers Titas Sadhu and Saima Thakor to make their mark.

Vice-captain and off-spinner Deepti Sharma will be crucial, especially after her career-best bowling performance of 6 for 31 in the third ODI against the West Indies. Priya Mishra and Tanuja Kanwar will play key roles in supporting Deepti.

Eyes will also be on all-rounders Raghvi Bist and Sayali Satghare, who have been included in the squad for this series. Bist has the ability to score quickly and is also a reliable fielder. She will look to seize the opportunity after making her debut in the WI T20 series.

Ireland, led by Gaby Lewis with all-rounder Orla Prendergast as her deputy, will face a tough challenge against India. *—PTI*

Bumrah is next captain: Gavaskar



Jasprit Bumrah leads from the front, said Sunil Gavaskar *PHOTOS: X*

SYDNEY, 9 JAN

Indian cricket legend Sunil Gavaskar is in awe of Jasprit Bumrah's leadership qualities and reckons the peerless fast bowler will succeed Rohit Sharma as the next captain of the Indian team following his extraordinary display in the Border-Gavaskar Trophy.

Bumrah recently produced one of the best-ever bowling performances by an overseas pacer in Australia and picked 32 wickets over five Tests.

He was also captain during India's only victory in the series at the Optus Stadium in Perth in the opener.

"He could be the next man. I think he will be the next man. Because he leads from the front, he has got a very good air about him, the air of a leader but not somebody who is going to pressure on you," Gavaskar said.

"With Bumrah you can see that, he expects the others to do what their job is, why they are in the national team, but it doesn't seem to pressurise anybody," he added.

Bumrah has been spearheading the Indian pace attack for some years now and his guidance has helped the likes of Mohammed Siraj to grow as a fast bowler. "With the fast bowlers, he has been absolutely brilliant, standing at mid-off, mid-on and every time just being at hand to tell them. I won't be surprised if he takes over very soon." *—PTI*

India unveil squad for Kho Kho WC

NEW DELHI, 9 JAN

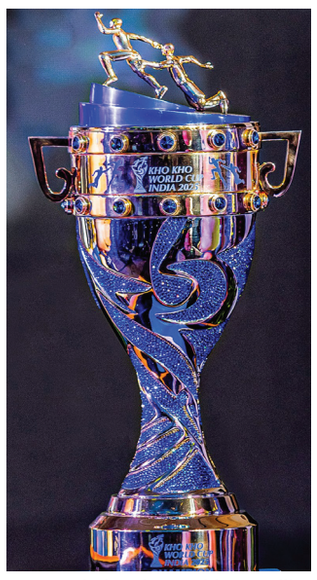
Prateek Waikar will captain the men's team, while Priyanka Ingle will lead the women's side as hosts India unveiled its squads for the inaugural Kho Kho World Cup, set to begin here on 13 January.

The tournament will be held at the Indira Gandhi Stadium from 13 to 19 January. The Indian men's team will face Nepal on the opening day, while the women's side will take on South Korea on 14 January.

In addition to Prateek and Priyanka's leadership roles, Sumit Bhatia will serve as head coach for the women's team, while Ashwani Kumar will mentor the men's squad.

"It is the first World Cup and I have been chosen as the women's team captain, it is a great feeling indeed. In the coming years Kho Kho will grow in this country and the juniors should practice hard, as they may get opportunities to play in the Asian or Commonwealth Games or even the Olympics," Priyanka told PTI.

Kho Kho Federation of India President Sudhanshu Mittal, alongside Kho Kho World Cup CEO Major General Vikram Dev Dogra, made the announcement. In addition, the trophy that will be presented to the winner of the women's edition was also unveiled on Thursday.



Inaugural Kho Kho World Cup will begin in New Delhi on 13 January. *PHOTO: X*

Ahead of the tournament, a preparatory camp was organized at Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium, where 60 boys and girls from across India competed for a spot on the national teams. *—PTI*

TENNIS TOURNAMENT

Senthil, Maaya keep Indian flag flying at ITF J300 event

NEW DELHI, 9 JAN

Senthil Kumar had to work hard to book his place in the boys semifinals of the ITF J300 event while Maaya Rajeshwaran advanced to the last-four when her opponent withdrew mid-way from her quarterfinal, here on Thursday.

Top seed and favourite Senthil, ranked as high as 36 in the world, was up against compatriot Samarth Sahita, who belied his 280th rank with a stunning fight.

Senthil had to dig deep into his resources to beat Samarth 6-3 3-6 6-4 in the gruelling quarterfinal at court number 3 at the DLTA Complex.

It could have been an all-Indian semifinal too but Arnav Paparkar fell to fourth seed Korean Donghyun Hwang 6-4 4-6 5-7 in another high-quality quarterfinal in the boys event.

Now Senhtil and Hwang will clash for a place in the summit final.

The other semifinal will be between Korea's Hyon Seok Seo and America's Rosha Santhosh.

Seo fought past Latvia's Arturs Zagras 7-5 6-4 while Santhosh also had to work hard to earn a 6-1 2-6 7-6(4) win over Kazakhstan's Damir Zhalgasbay.

In the girls singles, Maaya continued her giant-killing run as she knocked out seventh seed Rada Zolotareva, who pulled out of the quarterfinal contest when the Indian was leading 6-3 1-0.

The other semifinal will be between Polina Berezina and Ekaterina Tupitsyna, who sent packing eighth seed Briton Allegra Korpanec Davies 7-6(9) 7-5.

The boys doubles final will be between fourth seeds Artem Bogomolov / Roman Kharlamov and Alan Aiukhanov/Alexey Shibaev after they won their respective semifinals. *—PTI*

Senthil Kumar had to dig deep into his resources to beat Samarth 6-3, 3-6 6-4 in the gruelling quarterfinal in New Delhi *PHOTO: X*

Prannoy loses in second round of Malaysia Open

KUALA LUMPUR, 9 JAN

Indian shuttler HS Prannoy's valiant fight ended in a narrow loss to China's Li SHi Feng in the men's singles second round at the Malaysia Super 1000 badminton tournament here on Thursday.

The 32-year-old Indian, returning to action after the Paris Olympics, recovered from an opening-game reversal to stay in contention but fell short, losing 8-21, 21-15, 21-23 in an hour and 22 minutes to seventh seed Li.

Earlier, the women's doubles pair Treesa Jolly and Gayatri Gopichand suffered a 21-15, 19-21, 19-21 defeat to China's Jia Yi Fan and Zhang Shu Xian in their round of 16 match.

In mixed doubles, Dhruv Kapila and Tanisha Crasto, who had reached the final of the Syed Modi Super 300 International Tournament, went down 13-21, 20-22 to China's seventh seed Cheng Xing and Zhang Chi in 44 minutes.

Later in the day, last year's finalists in men's doubles, Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty, along with the mixed doubles duo of Sathish Karunakaran / Aadya Variyath and Malvika Bansod, will take to the court. *—PTI*

Oz Open: Sinner, Novak in opposite halves

MELBOURNE, 9 JAN

Defending champion Jannik Sinner and 10-time Australian Open winner Novak Djokovic have landed in opposite sides of the draw for the season's first major, ruling out a replay of last year's semifinal match.

Sinner upset Djokovic in the semifinals in Melbourne last year, before coming back to beat Daniil Medvedev in the final 3–6, 3–6, 6–4, 6–4, 6–3 for his first Grand Slam singles title.

Top-ranked Sinner has a first-round match against Nicolas Jarry and also has Taylor Fritz, Ben Shelton and Medvedev in his quarter of the draw.

Fritz will open against fellow American Jenson Brooksby.

Djokovic and No. 3 Carlos Alcaraz could meet in the quarterfinals, with a possible semifinal against No. 2 Alexander Zverev.

At the draw Thursday to set the brackets for the singles fields, defending champions Sinner and Aryna Sabalenka walked into the official ceremony on the steps of Margaret Court Arena, holding their trophies.

Sabalenka eyes 3rd consecutive title

Sabalenka won her second consecutive title at Melbourne Park in 2024 by defeating Zheng Qinwen 6–3, 6–2.

She will vie for a third consecutive women's singles title at Melbourne Park, something last accomplished by Martina Hingis from 1997 to 1999.

Sabalenka drew a tough opening match against 2017 US Open champion Sloane Stephens and has 17-year-old Mirra Andreeva and Zheng in her section. *—PTI*

Jannik Sinner upset Novak Djokovic in the semifinals in Australian Open in Melbourne last year *PHOTO: PTI*

TOTTENHAM BEAT LIVERPOOL 1–0 IN SEMIS OF ENGLISH LEAGUE CUP

LONDON, 9 JAN

Lucas Bergvall's first goal for Tottenham secured a 1–0 win over Liverpool in the English League Cup semifinals on Wednesday in a first-leg match notable for a serious-looking injury to Rodrigo Bentancur and the first in-stadium announcement by a referee in the English game.

The 18-year-old Bergvall slotted home the winner in the 86th minute following a pass from Dominic Solanke, who thought 10 minutes earlier that he had given Tottenham the lead. That goal, however, was ruled out after a VAR check for offside and referee Stuart Attwell communicated the decision via a wireless microphone to spectators inside Tottenham Hotspur Stadium and to TV viewers.

In the sixth minute, Bentancur, the Uruguay midfielder who plays for Tottenham, fell to the ground and lay prone after landing awkwardly when attempting a header from a corner. He was carried off on a stretcher, to applause from around the ground, after receiving treatment during a 10-minute delay and Tottenham manager Ange Postecoglou confirmed after the game that Bentancur was "conscious" and talking.

The second leg is at Anfield on 6 February. Newcastle leads Arsenal 2–0 after the first leg of other semifinal match. *—PTI*

Punjab FC to face NorthEast United FC

GUWAHATI, 9 JAN

After suffering four consecutive defeats, Punjab FC will look to effect a turnaround and inch closer to the play-offs when they face NorthEast United FC in the Indian Super League in the Assam capital on Friday.

If the Shers, who have 18 points, can break the losing string, they will be just one point away from the playoffs.

NorthEast United have 22 points and will look to consolidate their place in playoffs.

Punjab FC will be bolstered by the return of their key attacking players in Luka Majcen, Pulga Vidal and Filip Mrzljak while Ivan Novoselec will also return in defence.

"When a team is not having the desired results, losing four games in a row, it makes us feel that we have to improve our game," PFC head coach Panagiotis Dilmperis said on the eve of the match.

"There are many reasons why these results have happened and we have addressed them and will rectify them in the match tomorrow. We have conceded a lot of goals in the last few matches due to various reasons but we still have one of the best defensive statistics in the season."

About the opposition and the NorthEast United coach, Dilmperis said, "I respect Juan Pedro Benali and he is a great coach who coaches his team like an engine." *—PTI*

NEW SEASON

Sony Open starts the race for fewer PGA Tour players

HONOLULU, 9 JAN

The royal palms on a Waialae course that runs along the Pacific Ocean give a peaceful ambiance to the Sony Open, the ideal place for the full PGA Tour membership to start the year.

But a new season has brought a small degree of stress in paradise.

The Sony Open effectively starts the chase for a PGA Tour card — only 100 from the FedEx Cup this year, down from 125, marking the most significant change in eligibility in some 40 years.

Camilo Villegas described it as an important year for him, and it's only January.

PHOTO: X

Optimism, of course, is as great as ever. Villegas won in Bermuda toward the end of 2023 to earn a two-year exemption, and last year was among his best. He knows he has to play well to keep his job, and he was unwilling to even address the possibility he won't finish in the top 100.

The Sony Open is the start of a three-tournament stretch in which the leading five players become eligible for $20 million signature events in California. Getting in the big events can go a long way for someone trying to keep his job.

Ryder Cup captain Keegan Bradley has even more experience with the optimism and nerves that come with a new season. He made his debut as a PGA Tour member in Sony Open in 2011. Bradley went on to win Byron Nelson and PGA Championship that year. *—PTI*

Sumit Nagal to play Machac in Oz Open first round

MELBOURNE, 9 JAN

India's highest-ranked singles tennis player Sumit Nagal will take on Tomas Machac of the Czech Republic in the opening round of the Australian Open, beginning here on Sunday.

The 27-year-old Nagal, currently 96th on the ATP, made it to the main draw of the season-opening Grand Slam by virtue of being among the 104 highest-ranked players in the world.

The player from Haryana, then ranked 137th, had scored a stunning straight-sets win over No. 27 Kazakhstan's Alexander Bublik in the opening round of the Australian Open last year before going down to China's Juncheng Shang *—PTI*